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December 18, 2006 A Reformed Biweekly No. 2805

All this took place to fulfill what the LORD had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, God with us." Matthew 1:22, 23

Christmas

I bring you glad tidings – with power

Handel's *Messiah*

Marian van Til

If someone were to force me to choose a favorite composer, I'd readily say Johann Sebastian Bach. Nevertheless, I've had a love affair with George Frederic Handel for as long as I can remember. I literally heard Handel's music (and Bach's too) in the womb. My parents had their sturdy table-top Zenith radio permanently tuned to WFMT, Chicago's "fine art station," our source for classical music day and night.

Almost permanently, that is. While my mother appreciated classical music, when my father was at work she liked to listen to the station owned by Moody Bible Institute. My solidly Reformed father wasn't entirely happy with that, I remember. The theology espoused by the various Moody Bible-study programs was too Arminian, and downplayed the sovereignty of God, he said (quite rightly: MBI took the view, as most evangelicals do, that God can't act to save you until you choose to be saved). While WMBI did play some classical music and classic hymns, the main diet was gospel songs and choruses in that era before commercial "Christian contemporary music."

Nevertheless, from my first breath I grew up hearing hour upon hour of classical music on the radio. In those days, before the real resurgence of Baroque music, we didn't hear a large variety of Handel (or Bach). But we did hear a few Handelian staples: the Water Music, the "Harmonious Blacksmith," and of course, *Messiah* at Christmas, and sometimes at Easter. Or rather, we heard parts of it, and in the 19th century-Romantic-style, stately (*slow*), huge-orchestra-and-chorus renditions that were still popular in the 1950s and early '60s. No matter, I quickly came to love Handel indiscriminately.

We did not own a phonograph until I was in high school, when my dad bought me a clunky used cabinet stereo (stereo: the latest, greatest thing for audiophiles!). I was allowed to keep that stereo in my bedroom, and I came to cherish it. That's when I began my mostly-classical record collection (some of which old LPs I still own).

Do-it-yourself music

Then there was the piano in our living room. My dad was my first teacher, from when I was four years old. We had other instruments in the house, but they don't figure in my attraction to Handel. From earliest memory, there was a *Messiah* score either in the piano bench or on the music rack, a ledge which stretched the whole width of the upright piano. As my lessons progressed I got to the point that I could play *Messiah's* easy chordal recitatives and could pick out the tunes and some bass notes of the easiest *Messiah* arias. Then I got a new teacher (one of my sisters, an ace musician) and I learned more bits of *Messiah*.

Then I got another teacher (our church organist, an eccentric spinster who smelled like moth balls), and after while another; and I played even more of *Messiah* and began singing along as I played. I don't remember ever having been assigned in lessons the learning of any part of *Messiah's* piano reduction score (the orchestral accompaniment reduced to playability on a piano). I simply did it on my own because I was powerfully drawn to the oratorio. But even at that age, I know I was drawn not only to the music but to *Messiah's* libretto, straight from the Bible. And I was deeply affected by the inexorable power of Scripture set to exquisitely crafted music.

Live, from the school gym

So I grew up hearing classical music every day of my life. What I haven't mentioned yet is the other important component of our family's musical life (and I hope it still is in the lives of all families in which parents want to expose their children to the great music of Western civilization): attending concerts to hear the music live. Where I grew up, 25 miles southeast of Chicago, there had already long existed a group called the Illiana Oratorio Society. ("Illiana" is an often used regional combination of "Indiana" and "Illinois," and is also the name of the Christian high school in the area where the society's *Messiah* performances happened to be held.) The oratorio society had been formed specifically to perform *Messiah* every Christmas. It was made up mainly of Christian Reformed people who loved to sing, and who especially loved to sing *Messiah*. Audiences for those performances filled the large gym, as I recall.

In those days there was no orchestra to be heard (or seen); the performances were accompanied by piano and organ together. Today I would probably cringe if I were able to hear again one of those technically inept, stylistically incorrect performances, but as a child I eagerly anticipated them. Those *Messiah* concerts were as much a part of our Christmas celebration as the going to church on Christmas was. Handel, I would find out a little later, wrote *Messiah* and his other oratorios for performance during Lent, a period when opera and most plays were forbidden in London and elsewhere in the British Isles. But no matter. *Messiah* is timeless both in terms of season and age. I say without doubt that Handel would be happy to know that *Messiah* was still being performed in the 1950s-'60s at *any* time of year, and that it still is, 265 years after he wrote it.

The Word comes in power

What is it about *Messiah* that is so compelling? I believe it is first of all its biblical text, and then Handel's artful welding of that text to music. God's Word does not return to him void (as the KJV puts it), and God's Word comes through loud and clear in *Messiah*. I am aware that there are many music-loving non-Christians (including numerous Jews) who own recordings of *Messiah* and listen to it in concert simply because they love the *music*. They are somehow able to ignore the words – the Word – they hear. I confess I am at a loss to explain how they do that. To me, *Messiah's* biblical text has the heart-piercing thrust of a two-edged sword. It has the Spirit-imbued power of Scripture, *plus* the peculiar emotional hold that profound music exerts over a listener. That's why I can't be a listener, or even sing in the chorus, without being moved to tears of yearning and joy at one point or another during the two-and-a-half hour oratorio. That involuntary response makes things a little tricky when one is singing in performance, but I know from discussion with fellow singers who are Christian that it's a common reaction, so no one is embarrassed about their own or fellow singers' tears.

An evangelical purpose

Charles Jennens was the Shakespeare scholar, music and book collector, evangelical Anglican and irascible colleague-friend of Handel's who compiled the Scripture verses for *Messiah*. Handel had already written five oratorios based on Old Testament figures and stories. But it was Jennens' idea in the summer of 1741 that Handel "set another Scripture Collection I have made for him, & perform it for his own Benefit in Passion Week," as he told his friend, the classical scholar Edward Holdsworth. (The first "Scripture Collection" he provided was likely *Israel in Egypt*, the only other biblical oratorio by Handel to use texts taken straight from Scripture.) Jennens continued, "I hope he will lay out his whole Genius & Skill upon it, that the Composition may excell all his former Compositions, as the Subject excells every other subject. The Subject is Messiah."

Jennens and Handel both knew the Bible very well. Jennens' particular culling and juxtaposing of texts for *Messiah* shows great insight into the over-arching themes of Scripture. And Jennens had a particular purpose in wanting Handel to take on *Messiah*: he saw it as an evangelical and evangelistic enterprise; it would present to listeners the whole story of salvation. We get a clue about that from the verses from 1 Timothy and Colossians that Jennens used to preface the word-book accompanying the first performance in Dublin (1742) and all subsequent performances in Handel's lifetime. Jennens summarizes the whole work with these verses:

And without controversy, great is the mystery of Godliness:
God was manifested in the Flesh, justified by the Spirit,
seen of Angels, preached among the Gentiles,
believed on in the world, received up in glory.
In whom are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge.
(1 Tim. 3:16, Col. 2:3, KJV, with 18th century capitalization)

Handel, of course, agreed to Jennens' idea and set his libretto in the fall of 1741. The rest, as they say, is history. It wasn't quite that easy, however. Handel wrote *Messiah* easily enough, in 24 days, the break-neck composing speed he almost always employed. It was received in Dublin by large audiences with vast applause. But London was another story. In Handel's adopted hometown it initially left a lot of people cold. They were leery of it being performed in a theatre and sung by opera-singer soloists whose lives were purportedly less than stellar examples of Christian living. These were not the opinions of a few kill-joys. These were serious concerns, discussed and debated in the papers. But eventually enough people heard *Messiah*, and felt its profound musical and spiritual effects, that the objections receded, then died away. The work became a phenomenon in the remaining decade-and-a-half of Handel's life. It made huge amounts of money to support both Handel himself and numerous orphans and widows by way of benefit concerts. Handel conducted it (and played the organ in it) over and over. Seriously ill and long blind, he heard it (and apparently participated) one last time a week before his death on Easter Saturday, 1759.

Handel's and Jennens' goal for *Messiah* was accomplished, and then some; and is still being accomplished. When, sometime after the first London performance, Thomas Hay, Eighth Earl of Kinnoull, commented to Handel about how well *Messiah* was entertaining audiences, according to Kinnoull, Handel replied, "I should be sorry, my Lord, if I have only succeeded in entertaining them; I wish to make them better."

News

Surprise! The Liberals choose another leader from Quebec

Harry der Nederlanden

By this time the face of Stephane Dion, the new leader of the Liberal party, has already become familiar to most of us, but a few weeks before the Liberal race most of us wouldn't have been able to identify him. He was a dark horse who ran well behind the two front runners, Michael Ignatieff and Bob Rae, and even lagged behind the young and upcoming Gerard Kennedy. Even as the Liberal leadership convention was underway, the pundits and the experts were describing it as a two-horse race, with Kennedy perhaps functioning as the kingmaker. On the day before the voting almost all of them would have put their money on Bob Rae.

Although Rae's history with the NDP and his less than stellar performance as premier of Ontario counted against him, the pundits speculated that his personality and experience would get him past that hurdle. Ignatieff had a strong lead and had most of the party bigwigs behind him, especially in Quebec. However, he had been out of the country too long, he had supported the American venture in Iraq and is a strong supporter of Canada's role in Afghanistan. During the campaign he had also pulled a couple of gaffes, referring to Israeli "war crimes" and raising the issue of Quebec nationhood. However, Harper's motion designating Quebecois as "a nation within a united Canada" let him off the hook on that score.

Dion was not considered a viable alternative because he was detested in Quebec, according to those who are supposed to know such things. Like Chretien, he has always been a strong federalist, and he was responsible for writing and defending the Clarity Act. The latter stipulates that although Quebec has the right to opt out of Canada, any plebiscite on the issue has to be unambiguously formulated. Apparently secessionists hate the Clarity Act, so Dion's action was considered anti-Quebecois. If Dion cannot carry Quebec, the Liberals cannot win a majority government, so they would be foolish to choose him as their leader. So the reasoning went.

So Stephane Dion's victory came as a complete surprise. Don Martin, columnist for *The National Post*, suggested that Canadians are opting for "the meek and the geek," as he also pointed to the victory of Ed Stelmach, a soft-spoken former farmer in the Alberta Conservative leadership race.

What Dion offered the Liberal delegates, more confused than divided, was someone with a clear position. In their speeches to the convention, neither Ignatieff nor Rae were very focused. Dion's delegates wore green and stressed the importance of environmental issues and a sustainable economy for Canada's future. Although when they were in power, the Liberals did little to meet the standards set by Kyoto, as the environmental minister Dion has expressed strong support for Kyoto. He even called his dog Kyoto. In view of the Conservative's virtual sidelining of Kyoto and increasing concern about global warming, delegates seemed to think this would give the Liberals a clear election issue over against the Conservatives.

The day after the convention, some Liberals were reportedly having some second thoughts on their choice. "What have we done?" they were asking themselves, according to some reports. "Have we chosen a leader who can't win?" *The Globe and Mail* described his choice as "a remarkable gamble."

Subsequent polls conducted by *The Globe and Mail* and CTV, however, suggest that Quebecers aren't nearly as put off by their native sons's history as the pundits say. Some 62 percent of Quebecers felt the Liberals had made a good choice. Four of the last five Liberal leaders have come from Quebec.

Although some, such as John Ibbitson of *The Globe and Mail*, see Dion as too much of a single-issue candidate, many others describe him as a brainiac who is as much of a policy wonk as Harper, so he should have no trouble diversifying his position. His federalism is nuanced, for although he believes in a strong federal government, he also believes its powers should be carefully delimited and many things decentralized. His federalism goes hand in hand with support for Quebec's unique status.

He is often described as a dove on Afghanistan, but his criticism of Canada's involvement there has not extended to a call for complete withdrawal. He disagrees with the way the Afghan campaign is being conducted, opposing aggressive pursuit of the Taliban and favoring instead a more passive role that emphasizes training and reconstruction. He speaks of a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan.

In his first press conference as Liberal leader, Dion waded right in, calling Harper a "control freak" whose idea of a social housing policy is "to build more jails and fill them with teenagers." He promised Canadians an early election to rid them of this "far-right" government, which in this holiday season is, of course, exactly what every Canadian was looking forward to.

Looking ahead, some journalists described the upcoming election campaign as a battle of the eggheads, but in terms of intellectual content Dion's first sally hardly scales the heights. However, the two leaders are remarkably similar in personality: both are described as reserved, uncharismatic, aloof, intellectual and principled, although both defend quite different principles.

Jeffrey Simpson of *The Globe and Mail*, in a penetrating character sketch, said that Dion is "sometimes oblivious to the feelings of others, inadvertently rude, annoyingly convinced of the absolute correctness of his analysis. He's a Presbyterian, politically speaking – unadorned, slightly severe, utterly determined, without pretence, searching for self-improvement, anchored in his convictions.

"Almost every former ministerial colleague can recount tales of Mr. Dion's righteous rectitude around the cabinet table. He didn't schmooze, make friends or build alliances. He just mastered his briefs, plowed forward and jack-hammered his arguments against any opposition. Not surprisingly, therefore, very few senior members of those cabinets supported him. His intellect, they respected; his political judgment and personal skills they did not.

"Mr. Dion's leadership campaign reflected the man. He worked relentlessly. He stayed focused. He knew what he wanted to espouse: a green Canada, a united Canada, a competitive economy.

"He called his approach the "three pillars" — social justice, economic development and sustainable development. He rained policy papers on delegates. He remained on message, so that it, rather than Mr. Dion himself, became the campaign – a compensation for his personal weaknesses as a campaigner.

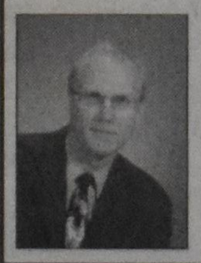
"He had the right message – the environment, specifically climate change – that delegates wanted to hear, because they believed in its importance, themselves, and prayed that it would be a winning weapon against the Conservatives."

Sounds as if there will be some interesting times ahead for the Liberal party – and for political commentators.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

Luke 2:14

From my family to yours,



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News

A reality check on the Iraq Study Group report

Its worth will ultimately be judged on the degree to which two key (if lofty) proposals succeed.

Robert Zelnick

BROOKLINE, MASS. – During the Iran hostage crisis a generation ago, I asked a senior State Department official what he would recommend to extricate the country from its predicament. "There is no good answer," he replied. "The trick is not getting into these situations."

Former Secretary of State James Baker, his Co-chair, Lee Hamilton, and their distinguished Iraq Study Group (ISG), must have echoed that sentiment often. But they persevered and came up with 79 recommendations Wednesday designed to end the US combat role in the country while averting humiliating defeat, giving Iraq the prospect of escaping unimaginable calamity, and providing the region with an opportunity to preempt what could become a spreading war.

For that they deserve credit, and for starkly debunking suggestions by Bush administration apologists that the war was somehow going better than accounts in the media might suggest. No, this is a war of unyielding Sunni insurgents, murderous Shiite militias, a dangerous sprinkling of international jihadists, mounting US and Iraqi casualties, and a staggering price tag of $400 billion to date, en route to a possible final tab of $3 trillion.

Four months ago, during a visit to Iraq, I encountered among senior coalition figures the seeds of disenchantment with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Some suspected his hatred of the old Saddam Hussein regime remained so intense that he wouldn't promote the reconciliation necessary for the Sunnis to end their insurgency. Others saw him as too politically weak and dependent on radical Shiite factions to offer a package that must include amnesty, a fair division of oil revenues, and a standing down of sectarian militias, particularly the 60,000-man Mahdi Army running wild through the vast Baghdad slum called Sadr City.

Still, the tendency in August was to give Mr. Maliki time to "get his legs." The Baker-Hamilton report, however, pulls no punches: "Maliki has ... ordered the removal of blockades around Sadr City, sought more control over Iraqi security forces and resisted US requests to move forward on reconciliation or on disbanding Shiite militias."

Two questionable proposals

For all its insight regarding where the Iraq effort stands and how things can get even worse, the report's worth will ultimately be judged by two groups of proposals designed to make possible a US withdrawal unburdened by mission failure. The first is a diplomatic offensive calculated to enlist key states in the area to support and assist an independent Iraq, encourage an end to the insurrection on generous terms and, of course, to cease all mischief of their own. Contrary to established administration policy, Iran and Syria would both be invited to the table.

The second would transform the US military role from combat to training and support for Iraqi forces, including a substantial US component embedded with host country troops. By early 2008, the plan envisions a complete end to the US combat role with a drawdown of US forces to about half their current number of roughly 145,000.

Two proposals – two probable failures

My problem with both plans is that neither seems likely to work. Both advertise US weakness when even during its period of military and political dominance the US-led coalition could not prevent Iran from training and equipping Shiite militias, Syria from providing a haven for Hussein loyalists and looking the other way as Al Qaeda operatives slipped across the border into Iraq, or Iraq's Sunnis from attacking the "occupier."

As a position of power and influence in Iraq has already fallen into his lap, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad isn't likely to abandon his Holocaust denial activities long enough to attend Mr. Baker's event. In several interviews Wednesday, Baker admitted as much. His fallback position: Try to "flip" Syria from its current Iranian benefactor by offering Damascus the opportunity to negotiate with Israel for return of the Golan Heights, captured by the Israelis in 1967. In addition to behaving in Iraq, the Syrians would also stay out of Lebanon, assist the UN in investigating two political murders in Lebanon, block Iranian weapons shipments to Hizbullah that now transit Syria, and persuade Hamas to recognize Israel.

When does diplomacy become fantasy? Viewed in the cold light of day, the panel's "New Diplomatic Offensive" would qualify.

As to the cluster of proposals involving a changed US military role, I fear this would mean foreclosing an important opportunity to make the numbers work to the advantage of the coalition. Just months ago, Marine Corps intelligence estimated that with an additional division in Anbar Province, the marines could defeat the Sunni insurrection. The fleshing out of Iraq's 10 divisions this year, and their accelerated training in 2007, could have complemented the US fighting force, probably enabling it to field that extra Anbar division, with a corresponding increase in bargaining power. Instead, the US would suffer a sharp diminution in combat and bargaining power as the drawdown begins.

A particularly frightening consequence of the combat drawdown could occur in Baghdad itself, where the removal of US troops would leave residents totally at the mercy of Shiite militias overseen only by troops from the Shiite-controlled Army.

Two additional items bear mention. First, the ISG gives short shrift to the Kurdish autonomy issue and the inclusion of the oil-rich territory of Kirkuk in Kurdish lands. Blithely, the group proposes postponement by one year of a referendum on Kirkuk, constitutionally mandated to occur in 2007. When I visited the area in August, two senior American officers warned that the Kurds would go to war rather than surrender Kirkuk. They argued, too, that the pro-American Kurds were a much better strategic bet than a Shiite-led Iraq strongly influenced by Iran. Even as a nominal part of an Iraqi state, their freedom is worth US protection.

The Israeli–Palestinian question

Finally, the panel urges the administration to re-energize the Israeli peace talks with Palestinians who accept Israel's existence. Peace talks are not a synonym for peace and unless carefully prepared, they can lead instead to war. Witness the failure at Camp David in 2000 and the resulting human carnage of the second intifada.

Does any Palestinian today have both the will and the political power to negotiate a deal with Israel that waives the so-called right of return for refugees from the 1948 war and their descendants? Will the region be more content with a failed Camp David-type spectacular, or an effort that begins with such modest confidence-building measures as a cease-fire accord, an easing of travel restrictions, and selective prisoner releases? In any event, the bridge between Israelis and Palestinians is fragile enough to barely support the weight of its own parties. Adding to it the weight of a conflict between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq is simply not smart.

• Robert Zelnick is a professor of journalism at Boston University and a research fellow at the Hoover Institution.

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Seasons/Letter

On opening the doors wider

In some way I liked the thinking behind the Guest Editorial by the Rev. Beunk in your Dec. 4, '06 issue. I liked it, because it brought back memories of my years as teacher at various Christian schools, schools which in essence were not just Christian schools but Christian Reformed schools – church schools, in other words.

Over the past 45 years or so, most if not all such CRC schools have broadened their base and have opened their doors to the larger evangelical communities in which they operate. The result has been that in most such schools many different denominations are represented. And that is a wonderful thing: on Sunday all the children in these schools attend the church of their parents' choice, but on Monday they all faithfully troop back to the school where they and their friends, children of all different kinds of denominations receive a Christ-entered, Christian education. This does not mean that I have no concerns about the Rev. Beunk's article, for he would open the doors even wider and admit any child. I have a problem with that.

States he: "Clearly constitutions will need some revising and the issue of membership will need to be addressed.... Sure there will be some details to work out, but thoughtful consideration will take care of these details."

The statement is unusual, if not naïve. Having spent well over thirty years in Christian education in this country, I am very much aware of the history of writing of constitutions. Many, many hours of deliberation, study and prayer have gone into these important documents, used in all the Christian schools of our land, crafted by godly people, people of courage and insight. To dismiss the effort that has gone into the crafting of these constitutions as something needing just some minor adjustments, "details to be worked out," is presumptuous. And I won't even go near his disdainful view of sphere sovereignty.

I was also struck by the section whereby after a prayer by a principal a Muslim parent was noticed having a tear in his eye and commented that was the most beautiful prayer he ever heard. But I have another story about a Muslim.

As principal of this particular Christian school I interviewed a mother who wished to enroll her two children. The mother was a Christian. She readily confessed her love for the Lord and had a burning desire to have her children educated in a Christ-centered environment. When I asked about her husband, she sadly informed me that he was not a Christian, but a Muslim. The lady's last name was Cahill, but she was desirous of having her children be enrolled under the name of Kelly.

It turned out that she had been a Muslim in Egypt, the country where she lived for some time, and had met her husband there. However, like the apostle Paul, she had had a sudden conversion experience, and had become a devout Christian. So here she was: the husband a Muslim, and she a Christian. As it was school policy to allow admission of children where at least one of the parents was a Christian, I admitted the children. The interview took place in an early August, some 30 years ago.

The boys were students in what I believe were a grade 3 and a grade 5 class. Their English was good, and they progressed well. During the annual Christmas program both Mrs. Kelly and her Muslim husband were present. But a few days into Christmas break, I received a telephone call from a crying Mrs. Cahill asking me if I could please come to school and speak with her. Of course I drove down immediately, met with her in my office, and was told that Mr. Cahill had been terribly upset about the Christmas program where the Bethlehem-born Jesus had been proclaimed as the promised Messiah. During the night he had taken the boys out of the home, had taken them to the airport and from there to Toronto, and next had taken a flight to Cairo. I met with Mrs. Kelly on several more occasions. She had even hired a private detective, the Canadian government became involved, but her husband, and the boys, had gone. For good.

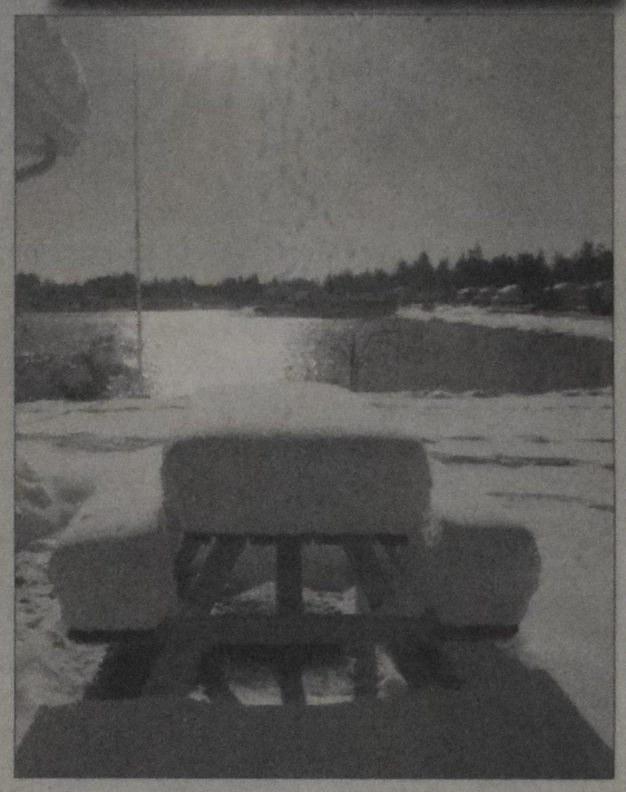
Christian schools should be fully inclusive, and open to all children of believing parents. 'Opening the doors wider' would not have my vote. To my mind Nicholas Wolterstorff, Ph.D., in his booklet *Curriculum – by what standard?* Says it best:

"Christian education is for Christian life. It is not for the training of theological sophisticates, not for the continuation of the evangelical churches, not for the preservation of Christian enclaves, not for getting to heaven, not for service to the state, not for defeating the Communists, not for preserving the United States or Canada, not for life adjustment, not for cultivating the life of the mind, not for producing learned and cultured gentlemen. Christian education is for Christian life."

Frank DeVries, Richmond, BC

Hopeful seasonal musings: hard-wired for kindness

Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove



It is a perfect Sunday morning as I watch soft, white flakes fall lazily from the dark and greying sky. Each flake adds its own unique cluster to the white carpet of lace as it gently covers our autumn grass. I open the window and reach out to catch a sprinkling of snow in my hand.

I love the beginning of a new season. I notice an unusual silence outside. There is no distant traffic hum that is so much part of the daily sounds of our neighbourhood. This kind of silence can be deafening for some people, but for me it feels strangely cozy and comforting.

By the afternoon we have eighteen inches of snow and I want to enjoy the winter wonderland our neighbourhood has become. I bundle myself up in thick, comfortable clothes and step outside into the chilly winter air. The snow feels soft and light under the tread of my boot as I create human footprints in a freshly painted and untouched white and crystal landscape.

Here and there I talk to neighbours as they shovel their driveway. They are friendly and upbeat. At the end of the street a truck is stuck in a ditch. People are clustering around to lend a hand. I hear them laughing and joking. They are kind, compassionate and keen to help out.

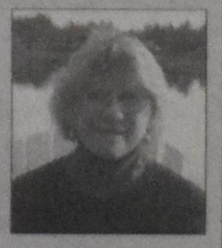
I think of the movie "Bobby" I saw the night before, a story based on the last campaign of Robert F. Kennedy with lots of original footage and filmed against the backdrop of racism, sexual inequality, class difference and the Vietnam War. It brought back memories of myself as a bra-burning flower child of the sixties vehemently but guiltily protesting the Vietnam War at the Peace Arch border south of Vancouver, B.C. Vehemently, because I believed the war to be unjust, guiltily, because of my gratefulness to Canada and the U.S. for helping Europe win the war against the despotism of Nazism.

I believe the motivation Emilio Estevez had in making this film is to remind the people of the United States and possibly the world at large of Robert F. Kennedy's vision for a more caring and compassionate America. While at first flush this vision may seem naïve considering the complexity of what is happening in the world today, it also reminds us that social and political change is slow but possible. At the very least, this film will challenge American citizens to once again ponder the possibility of becoming a less violent and more compassionate nation

At the same time and despite the tensions in the world today, this is not news to Daniel Goleman, a contemporary and well-known brain-science writer. He would readily agree with Kennedy's vision. In his new book *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships,* he describes how we are hardwired for kindness, cooperation and altruism, providing we develop the social intelligence to nurture these capacities in ourselves and consequently in others. He argues that despite the occasional streak of meanness and torrents of bad news throughout history that seem to contradict the claim, our daily encounters with parents, spouses, children, family members, friends and even strangers shape our brains and affect cells throughout our bodies – down to the level of our genes – for good or ill.

He quotes Harvard's Jerome Kagan who also believes that "although humans inherit a biological bias that permits them to feel anger, jealousy, selfishness, and envy and to be rude, aggressive, or violent, they inherit an even stronger biological bias for kindness, compassion, cooperation, love, and nurture – especially towards those in need."

Of course, the author also describes why the impulse for kindness and compassion is sometimes short-circuited, but that will be another column at another time. For now, we want to celebrate our natural inclination for empathy, cooperation, and altruism and take advantage of this blessed season to share and care for those in need. Furthermore, I hope our trust in God can also be nurtured during this time so that we again face the New Year with confidence and grace.



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Advent

Advent devotions

Wed., Dec. 20 Isaiah 9:8-17; 2 Peter 2:1-10a; Mark 1:1-8; Psalm 119: 49-72 and Psalm 49

In today's reading Peter warns of false teachers and destructive heresies, of people who appeared to be the Lord's followers but who were "even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them" and were focused on satisfying their own lustful desires of every kind.

The penalty meted out to such people is not pretty, according to Peter, but it may not be very evident here and now (thus the apparent accumulation of evil). If God did not spare the angels when they sinned, nor Noah's world, nor Sodom and Gomorrah, "then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment," Peter asserts. But there it is again: in the midst of certain judgement on the unrepentant, the righteous will just as surely be rescued.

Not only individuals but nations who fear the LORD will be blessed (as Psalm 67 reminded us a few days ago). God's mercy is always and ever available to those who turn to him. Once we have turned to him, how do we avoid the Israelites' pitfalls and stay on the right road? "Pray that you do not fall into temptation," Jesus tells us too. He knows our weaknesses, how easily we're distracted, how easily we tire, and tire of doing good. Thanks be to God our Saviour, who "delivers us from evil." We need only ask.

Come, Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ; our hearts are open wide in trust.
Oh, show us now your lovely grace, upon our sorrows shine your face,
And let your Holy Spirit guide our journey in your grace so wide.
We praise your holy name, from age to age the same.

Thurs., Dec. 21 Isaiah 9:18-10:4; 2 Peter 2:10b-16; Matt. 3:1-12; Psalm 50 and 33

In the Old Testament, when God's beloved people keep turning their backs on him they fall into all kinds of spiritual, social and political mire (as we do when we go our own way). They must stop it or disaster will befall them. "Then who will you run to for help, and who will get your riches?" God asks rhetorically. For centuries it's the same old story and finally God's wrath mingles with his mercy. He sends and re-sends ruin on their stingy, self-absorbed, idolatrous lives, each time to prod them to recognize their depravity so they will turn to him and be saved. "But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty," says Isaiah. They have forgotten who, and whose, they are, and refuse to see God's disciplining hand in the bad times that befall them (let alone to thank him for the good times). They jeer their prophets, and sometimes even stone them. They no longer yearn for the Day when a King far greater than David will come among them, a King who will reign forever.

More centuries pass. The Israelite survivors are dispersed. In Palestine they are under foreign occupiers again, this time the Romans. Suddenly here's another prophet of the LORD: a long-haired, honey-and-locust-eater whose clothes are not the soft and beautifully woven wool and linen of their image-conscious religious leaders, but made of rough camel hair, held closed with a leather belt. He seems isolated, probably by design (the better to pray and hear the Word of the LORD). He is out in the desert and people stream there to hear him preach: John, God-named son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, blood relative of Jesus the Worthy One for whose sake he preaches repentance.

Some heed him; others (their leaders) coolly observe his peculiar personage. What's this? He's quoting the great prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the LORD, make straight paths for him'"(40:3). That LORD has arrived at last, says John. And "his winnowing fork in his hand"! That is *not* the Messiah we like to think of at Christmas or any time. "He will clear his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire," preaches John. And you thought hellfire-and-damnation sermons were out?

That's not all. Just before that John had called the outwardly righteous, law-and-tradition-conscious religious leaders "a brood of vipers." You snakes! You deceiving hypocrites! Translated for us: If we call ourselves Christian, our hearts had better be in it, or we're defaming, yes blaspheming, the One whose name we carry. Going to church, being part of a long Christian tradition, keeping the rules, assuring everybody we've got it together – none of that is going to cut it if the light of Christ has not permeated our hearts. The Apostle Peter, too, in today's reading, has to deal with hearts of darkness, with people whose obsessions, greed and immorality eventually turn them into beasts in God's sight. Does anyone doubt that the human heart is still capable of such darkness?

John preached repentance, and the One whose way he prepared assures the repentant of forgiveness and eternal life. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

On Jordan's banks the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings glad tidings of the King of kings!
Then cleansed be every life from sin; make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare for Christ to come and enter there.

Fri., Dec. 22 Isaiah 10:5-19; 2 Peter 2:17-22; Matt. 11:2-15; Psalms 40 and 51

Yesterday we "met" John the Baptist. He was no tame preacher (to put it mildly). He wasn't the least bit concerned with image, or with saying the right things, things that allowed his listeners to maintain their "comfort zone." He said the right things by God's standard, and it got him thrown into prison (where he is in today's reading from Matthew). Later he would die by the will of Herod, a weak, pathetic man who was wholly consumed with image and what others thought of him.

Meanwhile, many who encountered Jesus were perplexed by him. Even John, in his prison cell with plenty of time to think, wondered whether he had been right about Jesus. Probably sensing his end is near, John wants his doubts answered. He sends some of his own disciples to Jesus to ask whether he really is the One or whether they should expect someone else to come as Messiah.

Jesus sympathizes with John's difficult situation and bears in mind on whose behalf the question was being asked. So he doesn't simply say, "Yes, I'm the one; go tell him I said so." He points to clear proof, to his miraculous deeds: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see," he says. "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."

Jesus then concludes his message for his kinsman John with this seemingly strange line. "Blessed is the person who does not fall away on account of me." It is a very personal note, full of compassion and grace. He speaks volumes in a few words: *Be of good cheer*, the undertone in Jesus's message says: *I don't want you to be despondent; don't become entangled by doubt because things look bleak. Think of your own mission, why God called you, what he revealed to you about me. You were the one about whom God said through Malachi, "'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'" You baptized me! You preached repentance on account of me. Blessed are you if you cling to me now, allowing your almost-certainty to be a certainty.*

John was surely heartened and filled with peace when his disciples returned with Jesus's message. We, too, may face bleak times, and Jesus's compassionate words apply to us as well: "Blessed is the person who does not fall away on account of me." Thanks be to God for the blood of the Lamb which takes away the sin of the world!

Hark, the glad sound! The Savior comes, the Savior promised long;
Let every heart prepare a throne and every voice a song.
He comes the prisoners to release, in Satan's bondage held.
The gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.

Sat., Dec. 23 Isaiah 10:20-27; Jude 17-25; Luke 3:1-9; Psalms 55 and 138

"Build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." That's the urging, the instruction, of the epistle of Jude for New Testament Christians and for us. As we've seen throughout Advent, having faith is only the beginning. Our faith must grow, and that doesn't happen automatically. It takes work, life-long work. "Work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," Paul tells the Philippians (2: 12). That doesn't mean faith isn't a gift from God; and it doesn't mean we can earn our

Advent

A Christmas lullaby

Lullay, lullay, little child,
Far from heaven's supernal glow,
You were sent to us below
God and man to reconcile.

Lullay, lullay, little child,
All this crying that you're making
As if all sleepers to awaken
Has the angel hosts beguiled.

Lullay, lullay, little boy,
Your voice will one day still
The wind and waves; your crying fill
Creation's every pore with joy.

Lullay, lullay, little child,
All this crying that you're making
So the stars above are shaking
Has the birds and beasts beguiled.

Lullay, lullay, little one,
Your crying cuts the heart so deep,
It pierces down to where we keep
The hidden fears that make us numb.

Lullay, lullay, little child,
All this crying that you're making
As if the vaults of heaven were breaking
Has both high and low beguiled.

Lullay, lullay, little brave,
For all the powers of this earth
Arm themselves against your birth
To turn this earth into your grave.

Lullay, lullay, little child,
All this crying that you're making
As if your little voice were staking
Claim to all the world beguiled.

Lullay, lullay, little king,
Let your protest louder swell
All our fear and hate dispel
And make all creation sing.

Lullay, lullay, little child,
Now rest your voice a little while,
For all of time is yours to style
the human heart with heavenly guile.

Harry der Nederlanden
[Inspired by 14th century lyric]

salvation by our works. It means that with care and awe and gratitude in the face of our holy God, we must work every day to please him more and more.

As we learned earlier this week (from Peter's epistle), building ourselves up in our faith will result in goodness (it will change our outlook, and we'll want to put your faith in action); then in knowledge (*real* knowledge, of God, ourselves, others and the world); then in self-control (our new knowledge starts to show us how necessary self-control is in order to progress on the road to sanctification); then in perseverance (self-control and all the previous steps will fade away without perseverance); then in godliness (as we persevere in faith we are more and more able to become imitators of Christ); then in brotherly-sisterly kindness (it all spills over into how we treat others); and finally in love – the greatest (because the most profound and sacrificial) of all godly attributes: our goal towards God and our neighbor.

Jude concurs with Peter's progression: as we work to build our faith we must keep ourselves in *God's love*. Everything comes down to God's love. His love reveals itself exquisitely in Jesus Christ, and in him and his mercy we *will* be brought to eternal life. No matter what we will then face, we will remain in God's love.

Psalm 138 has something to say to this too. "The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever." Notice the intertwining of God's enduring love with his purpose for each of us – and his not only having a purpose for us, but fulfilling it.

Then immediately the psalmist ends his prayer by urging God, "Do not abandon the works of your hands" (v. 8). It's really another way of saying: "I'm yours, God, you created me and did it for a purpose. You're not going to forget about that, are you? You're going to stick with me on my faith road, and work in my life? Yes, of course. I knew you would! I knew it was entirely right to vow at the beginning of my prayer, 'I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; before the "gods" I will sing your praise!'"

Stand, then, in his great might, with all his strength endued,
And take, to arm you for the fight, the weapons of our God.
To keep your armor bright, attend with constant care,
Still walking in your Captain's sight and keeping watch with prayer.
From strength to strength go on, to wrestle, fight, and pray;
Tread all the powers of darkness down and win the well-fought day,
Till, having all things done and all your conflicts past,
You overcome through Christ alone and stand complete at last.

Advent IV

Sun, Dec. 24 Isaiah 35:1-10; Rev. 22:12-17, 21; Luke 1:67-80; Psalms 45 and 46

There are always four Sundays in Advent, but this year there are not actually four *weeks* of Advent, since Christmas is on a Monday. So we'll skip ahead to readings designated for the morning of December 24.

We're now in the middle of the book of Isaiah and God is assuring his people, through Isaiah, that his judgement on them will not last forever. God *will* rescue them, and he does. But Isaiah's words also apply to God's ultimate rescue mission, to the coming of the Messiah. The Messianic age is unlike anything ever seen. Its repercussions will echo through all of creation: the lame will leap like deer and mute tongues will shout for joy; feeble hands will be given strength and weak knees become steady. The desert itself will rejoice and blossom, water will gush forth from the parched wilderness, burning sands will become pools. No ferocious beasts will haunt the Way of Holiness on which God's people will walk. Nor will anyone "unclean" – anyone who refuses to acknowledge God's holiness and accept his salvation – travel on that road.

In today's reading from Luke, Zechariah, father of the newborn John (the Baptist), is so emphatic about the reality of salvation through the soon-to-come Messiah, and so sure of God's promise (God had lived up to past promises again and again!), that he speaks as if the Messiah had already come: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people." Zechariah speaks of God's fulfilled promise of salvation even while he addresses his own newborn son as the one who *will prepare* the way for the LORD!

Now we move to the last chapter of the Bible's last book, the Revelation to the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos. Revelation paints pictures at once perplexing and disturbing, splendid and glorious. John has already been shown a vision of the New Jerusalem: heaven and earth transformed, wholly new and without corruption, just as we will be when the trumpet sounds, Christ returns, and we will spring from the grave in our resurrection bodies.

This City is a place of unspeakable beauty and perfection; there is no need for a temple – we won't be "going to church" – because God himself will be eternally living with us, and we will at last be free to see his face. (We will, finally, feel neither a need nor impulse to turn away in terror lest we mortals die when confronting his glory.)

An angel now shows John the focal point of the city: the River of Life, flowing crystal clear from the very throne of God and the Lamb. *Life*: no night, no crying, no pain, no corruption. The vision shifts to John's present, and Jesus himself tells John (and us), three times, in fact, "I am coming soon!" And "my reward is with me," he says: he will reward each of us according to our deeds. Even in this last biblical message Christ warns once more, and in blunt, graphic language, of the vast divide God sees between those who have followed Jesus and those who have refused to accept his service. There's still time to bridge that gulf, but the time is short. This revelation was given as a testimony to the churches (his followers on earth), he explains.

In his final words in revealed Scripture the Messiah says this about himself: "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star. (Yes, I am coming soon.)" To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever. Amen.

O Morning Star, how fair and bright! You shine with God's own truth and light,
Aglow with grace and mercy.
Of Jacob's race, King David's Son, our Lord and master, you have won
Our hearts to serve you only.
Lowly, holy! Great and glorious, all victorious, rich in blessing.
Rule and might o'er all possessing!

Seasons

Four seasons of university culture

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman

"The contemporary university is hollow at its core. Not only does it lack a spiritual center, but it is also without any real alternative." So says George Marsden in *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford, 1997). While that may aptly describe the core of the public university today, I believe four grand stories (which are also seasons in history) currently vie to occupy it. With some help, the four I've distinguished are: Christian establishment, established non-belief, default commercialism, and dialogic pluralism.

I. Christian establishment

It is no secret that all universities that were started over a century ago or more were motivated by deep Christian conviction. Most, in fact, began as seminaries for clergy training, and had clergymen as their first presidents. Chapels were mandatory, sometimes even twice a day. The mottos on these universities' crests reveal a deep purpose, set in the context of transcendence:

"In Christ all things hold together," from Colossians, McMaster U.

"Teach me wisdom, discipline, and knowledge," from the Psalms, U of Windsor.

"Wisdom and knowledge shall the stability of thy times" (Isaiah 33:6) Queens U.

"Under God's power she flourishes," Princeton U.

"Truth for Christ and for the church" Harvard U.

These were the days of the Christian establishment. But the monopoly could not hold. If these were truly to be the nation's public universities, they needed to change as the nation did. Canada became increasingly diverse, and a secular spirit was on the rise. Consensus was to be determined by what is "rational". Rational consensus determined who can speak, and rational consensus is the goal of all speaking.

II. Established non-Belief

Harvey Cox bestseller *Secular City* captured this spirit in 1965 which declared on its opening page: "The rise of urban civilization and the collapse of traditional religion are the two main hallmarks of our era…" (p. 1). Even the Beatles sang: "Imagine there's no heaven, its easy if you try…" Schools for medicine, law, and liberal arts soon eclipsed the original theological schools. Chapels disappeared, and the clergyman professor faded into the background. The notion of human progress through science replaced the former trust in Providence.

The mottos of the universities that were founded in this era reveal the replacement of theological themes with secular humanist themes. The horizon of expectation lowered as York University's crest declares "The Way Must be Tried" and Brock University "Surgite!" the last words of the dying General Brock at Queenston Heights in the battle of 1812, and Simon Fraser (1965) "We are ready."

This is the season of Established non-belief. If it was hard to be anything but a Christian in the first era of the university, the tables completely turned in this second season. Marsden explains how the dominant academic culture of today has become "defined in a way that [faith-related] viewpoints, including their counterparts in other Christian or religious heritages, have been largely excluded."(7) Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, and a dogmatic scientism become gatekeepers to the academic table.

III. Default commercialism

That was 1994. I believe we are beginning to see another season now, a season that is much less homogeneous, with an amnesia for the university's classical and Christian origins. Secular reason has been debunked by postmodern thinkers, as they say it only hides Western white male perspective, power and privilege. There are only a multiplicity of individual perspectives, each relative to one's ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and generation. What is left to pursue and share and hold the university together, except a power play of perspectives?

You might just call this "disestablishment of everything" season, but that gives a false impression. There are no vacuums, no neutral ground. From what I can see, it is what you might call default commercialism. Recent books like *The Corporate Campus*, *University, Inc.*, *Universities in the Marketplace*, and *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education* all basically say the same thing: commercial interests are the highest value on campus today. "Credentialing, not educating, has become the primary business of North American universities," prophesies Jane Jacob in last book *Dark Age Ahead* (2004).

Again, I turn to the mottos, or in this case, slogans intended to market the university's product. Brock University's recent slogan was "Your Career Begins Here." Windsor's slogan: "The Degree that Works." Queens: "Knowledge is Power." University of Western Ontario: "Major in Yourself." The trend is the same: universities are selling themselves to the student consumer as a degree granter that is the ticket to privilege, a secure career. It's not just that God and truth have disappeared from the aims of university, but so have the humanistic slogans of the sixties. All they can promise now is a place in the market. And the names of corporations on the campus buildings make it clear. The soul of the university is for sale.

IV. Dialogic pluralism

All three of the previous "seasons" still exist and play off each other. But Reformed people have been saying for decades already that there is another option, what might be called *principled pluralism* or a critical *dialogic pluralism.* This concept recovers the ideals of truth and spirituality, but invites everyone to the academic table, whether First Nations alternative health specialist, secular feminist philosopher, or specialist in ancient Jewish literature. It is understood that everyone comes to their research and teaching with a perspective or worldview. We bring all of who we are to university, and we need to promise to engage and challenge each other in making a just and peaceful society. Otherwise other interests will rule the day.

Harvey Cox changed his mind about secularization. Apparently it's hard to imagine there's no heaven. In his later book *Fire from Heaven* (Da Capo, 1995), he declares that "Today, it is secularity, not spirituality, that may be headed for extinction… the predictions themselves had been wrong… a religious renaissance of sorts is under way all over the globe."

A critical dialogic pluralism is the only way forward. As Nicolas Wolterstorff explains:

> Instead of assuming one can, and insisting that one should, strip off all one's particularities of perspective and engage in academic learning as a generic human being, moving from rational consensus in basis to rational consensus in results, I propose that we acknowledge that we have no option but to enter as who we are, human beings with shared faculties but ineradicably particularist perspectives. We enter as feminists, as Christians, as Jews, as African-Americans, as gays, as agnostics, as atheists, or whatever. And we then engage each other as much as possible with the goal of arriving at consensus on the truth of the matter under consideration, recognizing, what is in any case obvious, that whereas sometimes we succeed in achieving consensus, often we fail. (*Anastasis,* Winter, 2003).

The secular hegemony of the present will not hold. The Muslims pressure administrations for prayer space, the Jewish students request kosher food in the dorms, and global politics force religion back into the curriculum. The private/public dualism of modernity is crumbling, and only a critical dialogic pluralism in which all the voices can be publicly heard and debated will allow justice and truth to intersect.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.

The tiny tree

Lynn Marie-Ittner Klammer

My neighbors did a great job decorating for Christmas this year. All around their home are shrubs and trees wrapped in sparkling, white Christmas lights. The house is lit with white lights that line the porch and windows, and glisten off the layer of surrounding snow and ice. All in all, it's a lovely, warm holiday scene.

However, as I drove by on my way home last night, the overall beauty of the scene isn't what caught my attention. In the middle of my neighbor's front yard is a tiny little stick of a tree, set apart from the rest of the landscape. Wrapped around its branches are tiny blue lights. In fact, it's the only thing in the yard decorated in blue, and its small, diminutive figure seemed poignant to me somehow.

It wasn't until today that it occurred to me why the scene in my neighbor's yard had caught my attention. I work with a ministry that provides emotional support to those going through trying times. Right now I have five patients that I keep in touch with as a way to help lighten their load as they fight cancer.

When I went online for an update on Katie (my 10-year-old patient), I saw that she had allowed her family to post a picture of herself with her recently bald head (a result of chemotherapy treatments). How brave of her, I thought. I'm not sure I could have done the same thing if I were in her place. I wanted to tell her how that lack of hair, with her still smiling face below it, was a beacon of hope to other children going through similar situations…and then I thought of that tiny tree, and I knew why it had touched me so.

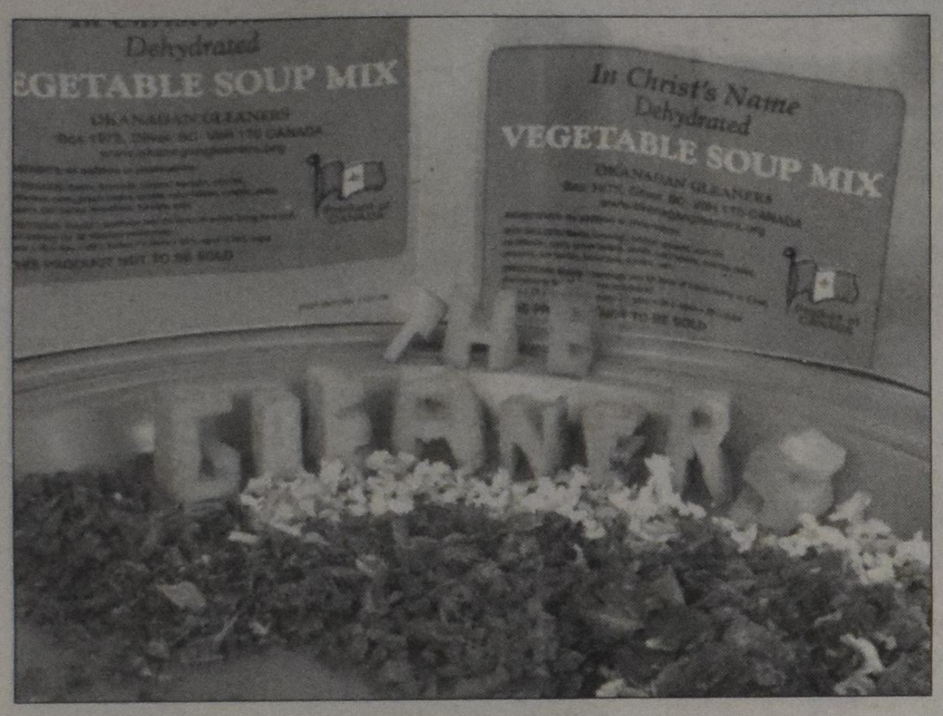
That tiny tree, with its few twinkling blue lights, reminded me of both the suffering and strength of my patients. When illness strikes, we are like that tiny tree, stripped of its leaves and bare to the elements. We try to stand tall amidst the vastness of our affliction, and hold firm against the cold cruelty and snowy winds that buffet us.

All around us however, no matter how small we are, or how vast our troubles, is wrapped the warmth and beauty of God's love – separate and unique from everything else. The other white lights of the yard put me in mind of the support of those we love – warm lights that can shine so brightly in our lives as they urge us on to fight and persevere.

If you find yourself among the many who are struggling against illness during this holiday season, I hope my view of the neighbor's yard lifts your spirits a bit. I know that in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds it can be difficult to keep trying. You may feel lonely and cold, different from everyone else, and separated from others. However, just as that tiny tree stood firm in the middle of that yard, you too can shine brightly with the comfort of God's love wrapped around you, and the knowledge that people care.

Diakonia

Christian gleaners build on Old Testament tradition



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Gleaning was God's idea (Deut. 24:19-22). Though in biblical times, communities were aware of its purpose to protect the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, it's a practice that many North Americans have never even thought about. However, some Canadian Christians have given it serious consideration. Not only have they thought about it, they've taken action with the conviction that gleaning is one way to help fight world hunger. In 1990 the Okanagan Gleaners in BC - the first operation of its kind in Canada - was established. In 2001 the Fraser Valley Gleaners started up near Abbotsford, BC. These two operations have inspired the conception of the Ontario Christian Gleaners (OCG).

Christian Courier recently interviewed John Verbinnen, president of OCG.

Verbinnen recalls how in December 2002 his wife, Cindy, read an article about the Okanagan Gleaners. It described how volunteers came from various communities, nearby and far away, to process donated vegetables into a dehydrated soup mix. Packages of the soup mix were distributed worldwide to hungry people through reputable relief organizations.

The Verbinnens asked the young people from their church, Zion United Reformed Church of Sheffield, Ontario, if they would be interested in volunteering for a week at the Okanagan Gleaners. "The idea was welcomed with great excitement!" Verbinnen says.

After many fund raisers and meetings, a group of fifteen young people and four chaperones, including John and Cindy, flew to BC in August 2003.

"Long before we went to BC, Cindy and I had pondered the idea of starting a gleaners' operation in Ontario," Verbinnen recalls. Through a close friend, Fred Nyland, who operates a large vegetable farm, Verbinnen became aware of how much produce is wasted, due to overproduction and to high consumer quality standards that farmers have to meet. For example, vegetables that are too small or too big, or the wrong shape or color are discarded and composted.

"After reading about the Okanagan Gleaners we realized the practicality of using this wasted produce to help feed hungry people," Verbinnen says. "Starting a gleaners' operation in Ontario had great potential since we grow so much produce."

While volunteering for the Okanagan Gleaners, the Verbinnens met with Bob Ellis, the manager, to learn how he became involved with the organization. "At the close of the meeting, we prayed for the Lord's guidance in considering the possibility of starting an operation in Ontario," Verbinnen recalls. "A few months after returning home that desire was still present in our hearts. So, we asked several interested people if they would be willing to assist us." On January 19, 2004, eleven people met in order to organize the OCG, and that summer the organization was officially incorporated.

The OCG will be modeled after the Okanagan Gleaners and the Fraser Valley Gleaners. Excellent cooperation and assistance from both operations have given the fledgling organization a helpful start. After working on a zoning amendment for over a year, in September 2006 OCG received approval from the North Dumfries Town Council to proceed with erecting a processing and storage facility on donated land on Morrison Road, south of Cambridge. An estimated $500,000 is needed to set up a 7,000 sq. ft. building and purchase necessary equipment. The organization will be seeking financial donations or pledges so that the project can begin in Spring 2007.

Many farmers have responded favorably to the OCG's requests for food donations, welcoming the prospect that, instead of being wasted, excess and blemished produce will be used to feed hungry people.

"A Mennonite minister contacted me to say that he can drop off several bins of food from Aylmer every day," Verbinnen states. "He said that we are not too far off the road so he would arrange the truck to stop by on his way to the Toronto food terminal. Also, a local farmer contacted me asking what crops he can grow for the gleaners next year. There is no shortage of produce available. We estimate that there is enough potential in Ontario to have several gleaners' operations running in different locations. If more gleaners' operations are required, we will look at the possibility of working as one organization so we can share resources."

The soup mix that OCG hopes to produce will be distributed to orphanages, aid projects, disaster relief missions, and other needy groups through reputable relief organizations. Verbinnen explains that in BC the gleaners have a report form that all distribution organizations are required to fill out when the product arrives at its destination, a system which allows them to track the duration of travel and confirm the arrival of the goods.

"We have learned in talking to people from the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)," Verbinnen says, "that there is a lot involved in the logistics of handling the food. For example, we learned that food packed in cardboard drums is subject to rodent, water, and physical damage at any point along the trip. A sealed metal drum will overcome the first two elements, and it is much stronger to withstand physical damage."

Another concern is maximizing the use of space in cargo holds. Though previously round, metal drums were used in ships with rounded holds, that can no longer be done because today's ships have square holds. Therefore, MCC is packaging their aid kits in cardboard boxes that fit the dimensions of a pallet to accommodate easier handling.

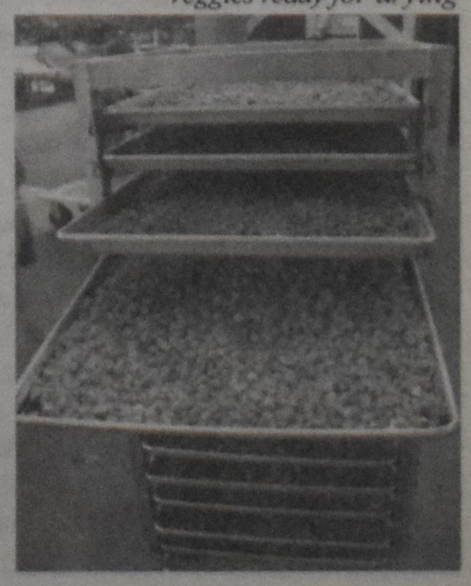
"I guess we have to find square metal drums now!" Verbinnen quips.

From Ontario, shipments might take several months to reach their destinations, and it can take several more months to offload and clear the shipment for release. The product then has to be transported inland to get to its final destination.

About the spiritual growth he and others have experienced through the process of establishing OCG, Verbinnen says, "Through this project our faith and dependence on our Lord have definitely grown. When we started, it was just a vision. We were just ordinary people, with no special gifts. How were we to inspire others and make them see the vision? Thanks be to God, we didn't have to inspire anyone. The Lord had worked in their hearts, just as he had in ours. How were we to find the right piece of property? Again the Lord worked in people's hearts, so that the way was made clear. We now have a major fund raising task in front of us. Once again, with hard work, prayer, and trust in God's providence, this too will be accomplished."

Anyone interested in volunteering, contributing, or learning more about the OCG may visit their website, www.ontariogleaners.org or contact Verbinnen at info@ontariogleaners.org.

Veggies ready for drying



Story/Review

Christmas time 1946: shortages and shortcomings

It was chilly in our portable classroom that December morning in 1946. The smoking wood stove was trying its best to spread some warmth, but most of our classmates had kept their coats on.

Our school had been bombed in the spring of 1945, just before the liberation of Holland, and with all the destruction, it would take a few years before we could move into a new building.

We had just begun our French grammar lesson, when our teacher, Mr. Jansen, made an announcement. We were not overly fond of him. This was his first year as a high school teacher after several years of teaching the lower grades, and we felt that he sometimes treated us as if we were still in elementary school. He was also rather short-tempered and gave far too much homework.

But this morning he seemed to be in a good mood. "As you probably know, it will soon be my birthday," he began, and inwardly we groaned. It meant that we had to have another collection and part with some of our hard-earned allowances for a gift. Since there were several staff members in the school, such things added up. "I'd like to treat you all," Mr. Jansen continued, "but I also teach three other grades and to take goodies for everybody becomes too expensive. Now, my wife promised to bake cookies, but you know that butter and sugar and eggs are still rationed. I told her, 'Don't worry, I'll just ask the students to bring those ingredients to school.' Tomorrow I'll bring some containers and all you have to do is ask your parents to donate something. If everybody pitches in, there should be no problem."

We muttered some vague replies, but frankly we were flabbergasted. During recess the girls put their heads together, for the boys did not seem to be very interested.

"This really means that we have to pay for our own refreshments," commented Jane. And Lucy added, "If he can't afford some cookies, why doesn't he skip the whole thing? You can also buy them, you know, if you have enough ration coupons. Store cookies cost a lot, but teachers make lots of money."

"My mother won't give anything," added Ann. "With seven kids in our family we don't have eggs or butter or sugar to spare. I'm not even going to ask her."

The more we talked about it, the more our righteous indignation grew.

And the results were plainly visible the next morning. Before school, we had a short meeting again, this time combined with the boys. Most of the boys, it turned out, had forgotten all about Mr. Jansen's request. Only three people had brought something. I was one of them.

"My mother said to look in the sugar bowl and I could take what was left in it," I confessed. "But it was almost empty. All I have is two tablespoons full, and I'm not going to make a fool of myself and give that to him. I had hoped that more people would bring something, and then I could have quickly dumped it into his container when he wasn't looking. But Mr. Jansen will probably be standing right beside his containers, so forget it."

My friends all agreed, but I thought I detected a wicked gleam in Jane's eyes. After the bell rang we quietly took our seats. Our first class was French again, so we stared somewhat uneasily at the two large containers prominently displayed on the teacher's desk.

"So," began Mr. Jansen expectantly, "would you please come forward and bring your contributions?"

We held our breath. Reluctantly two classmates walked to the front and deposited two small paper bags, only half full, into the waiting containers. Deathly silence.

Mr. Jansen cleared his throat and forced a smile. "There must be more who brought something – come on, don't be shy."

Then it happened. Years later when I thought of the humiliation she caused me, I often still had the urge to punch Jane. She put up her hand and, pointing at me with a smug smile, she said, "Yes, Mr. Jansen, she brought something too."

Our teacher brightened visibly and invited me to come to the front. I muttered feebly, "Oh no, not really, it's just a little bit."

But Mr. Jansen said, "Every little bit helps."

I had no choice. I fumbled in my briefcase and at the very bottom I found the small envelope with the tiny bulge. As I walked to the front, I swore I could hear my friends snicker.

Opening the envelope with trembling fingers, I held it over the container. It was even worse than I expected. The sugar seemed to have shrunk, or some had spilled into my briefcase, for only a brief trickle appeared. Not even enough to cover the bottom of a teacup.

My face was burning as I walked back. And even worse, Mr. Jansen did not utter a word.

"He must have thought I did this on purpose to humiliate him," I told myself, totally embarrassed.

"Let's start with the lesson," said Mr. Jansen in a strange voice. For the remainder of the hour we all behaved like model students. Somehow what had happened did not seem so funny anymore.

At the end of our French class, Mr. Jansen said quietly, " I guess it was a bad idea to ask for a contribution. Let's just forget about my birthday so we can all be happy."

We looked at each other and we felt rather uncomfortable. Had we been fair to him? He really wasn't such a bad teacher. Was he hurt or peeved?

But we soon forgot about the incident. Until the next day.

Instead of Mr. Jansen, the principal came to teach us French. "Mr. Jansen has a case of the stomach flu," he said, "and won't be in for a few days. Hopefully he will be back to teach again before or on his birthday next week." He fixed a penetrating look on us, and all of a sudden we knew that he knew. Nothing ever seemed to be hidden from him. Had Mr. Jansen talked to him? Not likely. But perhaps some students had talked to their siblings, and somehow it had gotten back to the big boss.

"I'd like to have your attention for a minute," he went on.

We knew something was coming, and it would not be pleasant. "I'd like to treat you like high school students. Most of you are twelve or thirteen years old – old enough to be able to see somebody else's viewpoint. Mr. Jansen's wife had a stillborn baby a few months ago. Most of you know about that.

"What you probably don't know is that she needs a very long time to recuperate. She can do very little work at home and help is hard to get. So your teacher has had to do lots of household chores on top of teaching high school for the first time. They have three young children at home who still cause a lot of work. Mrs. Jansen's offer to bake cookies for his birthday was a sign that she is beginning to feel stronger. So in Mr. Jansen's eyes, it seemed like a nice idea....

"I thought it wise to remind you that you should also practice your Christian faith in your daily lives. Now open your French workbooks."

During the next recess we again got together as girls. Now our comments were far more charitable.

"I guess we were pretty ignorant," said Jane.

Lucy added, "We should start collecting money for his birthday – and also buy something nice for his wife. We could get her a Christmas arrangement at the florist's. If you bring a pretty flower pot, they will put holly, tulips, red ribbons and a candle in it for not too much money. I can get a flower pot from my mom."

"I'll collect money from the boys, and I won't let them forget to bring it to school," vowed Ann.

We were all rather excited and even a little bit holy when Mr. Jansen returned to school again, right on his birthday. We were all beaming with good-will, and burst out in a joyful rendition of "Happy Birthday" as soon as he entered the classroom.

When we presented him our two gifts, we noticed that Mr. Jansen blew his nose longer than usual. Then he surprised us all by opening a tin of shortbread cookies and passing them around. "Sent to us from an aunt in Canada for Christmas," he announced with a smile.

I like to think that our classroom celebration, just before Christmas, taught us something about love and compassion and the true meaning of Christmas.

Berta Hosmar
Whitby, Ont.

The Nativity Story

David DiCerto

NEW YORK (CNS) — In an effort to reach as wide a market as possible, most Christmas-themed movies come gift-wrapped in a secular brand of sentimentality that completely misses the true meaning of the holiday. But Hollywood finally gets it right with "The Nativity Story."

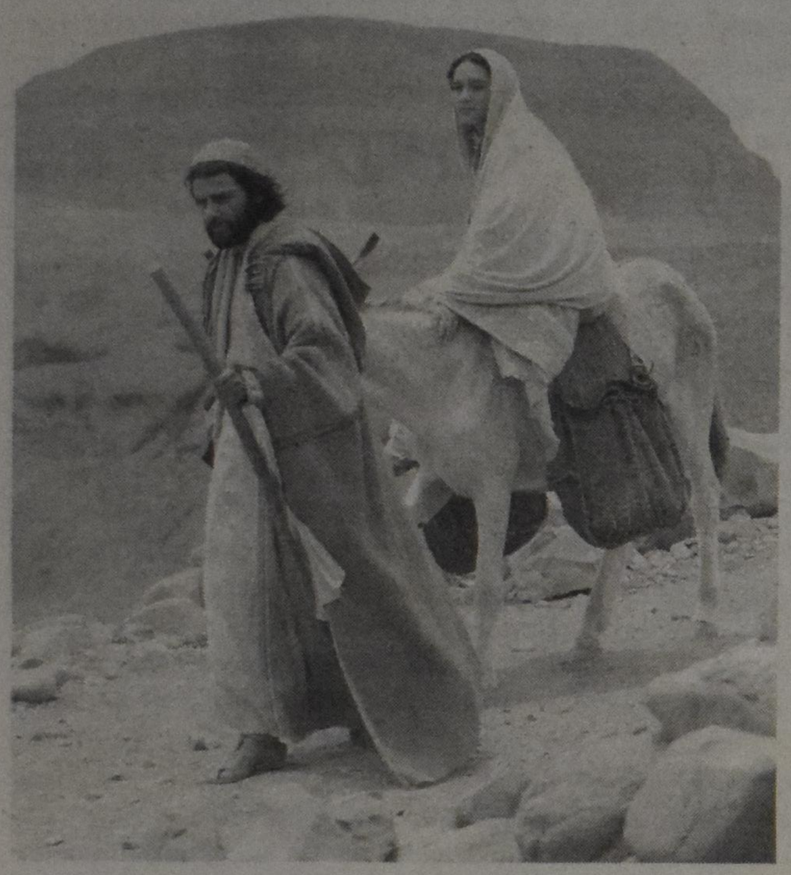
From the opening strains of the soundtrack – hints of the Advent hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" – you know you're in good hands.

A composite of the birth narrative accounts in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, embroidered with apocryphal traditions as well as the imaginative inspiration of the filmmaker, the Bible story gets prestigious treatment in director Catherine Hardwicke's artful, reverent and deeply affecting retelling. The film has an excellent international cast and impressive production design similar to that of "The Passion of the Christ," the financial success of which no doubt paved the way for this movie. (Without the blood and controversy, however, "The Nativity Story" should appeal to an even wider audience.)

Filmed in Matera – the ancient Italian town where Mel Gibson shot "The Passion" – and Morocco, it opens with prophecy-paranoid King Herod (Ciaran Hinds) plotting to kill all the male babies in Bethlehem.

Flashing back a year, Zechariah (Stanley Townsend) is told by an angelic voice that his wife Elizabeth (Shohreh Aghdashloo), though advanced in age, will bear a son.

In Nazareth, her young cousin, Mary (Keisha Castle-Hughes), a peasant girl – still



practically a child and living under the daily uncertainties of Roman occupation – is informed by her parents, Anna and Joaquim (Hiam Abbass and Shaun Toub), that she is to marry Joseph (Oscar Isaac), an upright carpenter a few years her senior. Troubled over her betrothal to "a man I hardly know, a man I do not love," Mary withdraws to a nearby grove where the Annunciation, nicely handled, takes place, with Alexander Siddig personifying the angel Gabriel who reveals she will give birth to Jesus.

Meanwhile in Persia, the three Magi set out to follow the star westward (explained here as a rare convergence of Venus, Jupiter and an astral body).

What is described with only a few lines in Luke's Gospel becomes the meat of the film, as Joseph and Mary undertake the arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, battling sandstorms, treacherous terrain, hunger and, while passing through Jerusalem, thieves.

Along the way, Hardwicke, raised Presbyterian, weaves in references that foreshadow events in Christ's life: Mary washing Joseph's feet; Joseph expressing anger over merchants in the Temple courtyard; a roadside crucifixion. In a more symbolic allusion, during a river crossing, Mary is imperiled by a snake, echoing the serpent of Eden.

Though the New Testament is sparse on details about Mary and Joseph, the thoughtful screenplay of Mike Rich, a practicing Christian, manages to flesh them out while remaining faithful to Scripture, beautifully suggesting the humanity beneath the halos.

As to the birth of Jesus, it's all there: the shepherds, the Wise Men, etc. Despite some greeting-card gloss, cloying sentimentality is avoided. Throughout the film, Hardwicke never waters down the religious elements to make the story more palatable for nonbelievers, most clearly demonstrated when she has one of the Magi proclaim the radical truth of the Incarnation by declaring that the infant is "God made into flesh."

In a poignant moment that inextricably links the manger to the cross, his fellow traveler – after his companions have presented their gifts of gold and frankincense – tearfully offers the Christ Child myrrh "for his sacrifice," portending Jesus' atoning death.

The film's hopeful message should resonate beyond Christian audiences to a world still groaning for peace and good will.

The rest of the story

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

Streaks of dark clouds swept by overhead while a raw wind intermittently pelted us with showers. I stared at the onyx urn beside the headstone, finding it hard to believe that it contained all that was left of my mother's earthly body. We stood there at her graveside, a tiny cluster of mourners on a bleak October afternoon. This is how she wanted it: no visitation; no fancy funeral; just cremation and to be buried without fanfare beside my father.

Jack held an umbrella so our pastor could read from the Psalms. I managed to hold back my tears until I looked at the grief-stricken faces of my children. My mother-in-law pulled a few notes out of her purse and began the eulogy I had asked her to prepare. Always a faithful friend to Ma, she now spoke with poignant honesty of my mom's character and her struggles. When she finished, Stephanie composed herself and shared a few memories of times with Oma – carefree days on the beach at Port Dover, the tons of goodies she always had on hand for her grandchildren, the way she would walk us to the car when we were leaving and stand there waving until we were out of sight.

The pastor offered a final prayer and we lingered a few minutes before the little group began to disperse. I hugged my mother-in-law, and my best friend, Gerty. I paused to talk to my brother and his friend, whom I hadn't seen in several years. I looked over my shoulder. There stood my three forlorn children, side by side in front of the headstone. I took my place between them and tried to wrap my arms around all of them at once.

After awhile we slogged through the sodden grass, back to the cars. We gathered at a nearby restaurant for lunch, talking about everything and nothing, reminiscing and laughing. In the two weeks since Ma died many tears had already been shed. What a relief to finally experience the "funeral," such as it was.

That evening I reflected on the events of the day. We do not grieve as people without hope, it's true. But now what? Every day our family had prayed for my mother's salvation. To my knowledge, she departed this world without ever reconciling with God. A disturbing thought. And yet I had an odd sense of peace about the whole matter.

During one of our last visits, as I helped my mother into her bed, an unexpected wave of compassion washed over me. I realized that I no longer held any grudges against my mom, only a deep-seated love. It struck me that if I could feel this way – me with my sinful, selfish, unforgiving heart – how must the Lord feel about her? Surely I could entrust her to the One who created her.

That moment was a point of surrender. I sensed it wouldn't be much longer before she died, but I also knew in my heart it would be okay.

Now it really was over. Ma was gone. A friend said to me one day, "Don't worry about your mom. Just ask God if she's in heaven. He will tell you."

Of course, I knew he had the answer. But it somehow seemed presumptuous to ask the question. Still, it nagged at me, a niggling little voice: Go ahead. Ask. Or are you afraid? After all, he is the God of mercy, but justice is also his nature. Finally I went to God in prayer.

A couple of weeks passed. I wrote my November column about Ma's death. The day after I sent it in, a card arrived in the mail. I recognized the sender's name. She was the lady from the Gideon Society I had once met while visiting Ma. At that time my mother considered her a "nuisance…always talking about God and reading the Bible." I opened the card and could not believe what I read.

The verse spoke of Jesus' ability to transform a person, "…from death to life, from darkness to light." Inside, in the Gideon lady's careful handwriting I read, "And Jesus did change something beautiful in your mother… She was not sure of her salvation until I told her that we are saved by grace…. That she is with Jesus is our comfort."

I read it over several times. Could this be true? Tears filled my eyes, but the pragmatist in me was already online, searching for the woman's phone number. My heart pounded as I dialed. Relieved to hear her voice, I identified myself, then simply asked her to tell me about her conversations with Ma.

I listened in stunned silence as she told me the classic story of a soul delivered. Not until she began to explain to me what "unmerited favor" meant did I interrupt her. "Oh, I'm familiar with God's grace," I said, "You see, we've been praying for my mother for nearly thirty years."

All this had taken place around the time when I noticed a marked change in my mother's disposition. She seemed more content than I had ever known her to be, smiling easily and finding pleasure in small things. I assumed she had literally forgotten her troubles as a result of senile dementia. Aware of my mother's memory deficit, the Gideon lady asked Ma about her salvation every time she visited after that. And my mother always answered that she was going to heaven because she'd been saved by Christ.

I could hardly wait to tell Jack the amazing news. Later on he commented, "I wonder why God never allowed us to hear it directly from Ma. Why didn't she say anything to us about it?"

I had wondered the same thing. Maybe with the way her memory was, she thought she had always been a Christian, that this was nothing new.

Or maybe it served a bigger purpose. Like the time Jesus was called to Bethany because Lazarus was dying and his response was to wait another two days. By the time he arrived, Lazarus was in the grave and there was no doubt whatsoever that he was dead, even according to Jewish beliefs. Then and only then did Christ call him back to life. That way there could be no doubt as to the veracity of the miracle.

This was important to my Gideon friend as well. When I told her I would be writing this story she said, "Don't mention me by name. It was all God's work and he deserves the glory. Besides," she added with a laugh, "I'd rather have my reward in heaven."

A few days later, while still considering the divine implications, I came across these verses in Lamentations 3: 22-24: "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in him.'" There in the midst of one of the saddest books in the Bible is a song of praise and hope.

How like our God to wait until we think a story is over before he shows us it's just begun. And how thankful I am to think of Ma in heaven this Christmas season. For her it's the first time she'll really be celebrating the birth of her Savior. And for those of us who love her, we're dancing just a few steps behind the angels.

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Christmas

The Christmas story in art

Christians have always reflected on the events of Christmas in the arts as well as in sermons, meditations and theology. Poetry, songs, music and stories have long been part of our Christmas celebrations. So, too, have been manger scenes on Christmas cards and creches.

Less visible has been the long tradition of painterly reflection on these events. When I was a kid growing up outside Edmonton, the only place to see something of this rich and varied heritage was in the public library downtown. There I'd often flip through huge volumes in the art section under the watchful scowl of the librarian, a grey-haired lady with reading glasses who seemed to be suspicious of a young boy who spent a couple of hours thumbing through art books.

The reproductions in art books nowadays are much better in terms of color and they are much more plentiful. But even more of the tradition is now available on the worldwide web. Artworks that once could be seen only by the very rich and privileged can now be seen by everyone.

Art books are, of course, very selective, and those selecting the pictures were often more interested in secular subjects than in religious or biblical themes, so they don't always show what a huge proportion of paintings made in previous eras were devoted to religious paintings. To be honest, it would become boring, for in the early history of Western art Madonnas – pictures of Mary with Jesus – were in high demand. They weren't aesthetic objects but expressions of religious devotion.

Only a small number of these paintings are actually set in Bethlehem in the familiar surroundings of the animal shed with shepherds or wise men coming to see the newborn. The huge majority have abstracted Mary and Jesus from any historical setting. Instead, Mary is often depicted on a throne, floating against an ornate background dominated by gold and surrounded by angels, sometimes the kind that look like winged babies (cherubs) and sometimes the kind that look like winged highborn ladies in flowing drapery. Joseph has vanished.

Of course, even in the nativity scenes set in Bethlehem, Joseph is often lurking in the shadows or missing altogether. He is often crowded out by angels or by visitors, especially when the magi show up with a large retinue. In several pictures Joseph is shown looking bored or dozing off. In an *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Mantegna, Joseph is so zonked you can almost hear him snoring.

Some artists, however, took pity on him and looked for a way to include him more meaningfully. In one nativity scene, we see Joseph in the background bringing more hay for the manger, and in another Joseph is down on his hands and knees blowing vigorously as he tries to get a small fire going to warm Mary and Jesus. Mother and child are incongruously shown lying in a very substantial bed with a crimson bedspread.

Even in the middle of the *Flight into Egypt*, the painter Gentileschi shows Joseph flat on his back, his head tilted back, dead to the world, while Mary tends to the baby. In a couple of other Flight into Egypt paintings you have to look hard to locate Joseph. See that tiny figure in the background flailing at a tree with a stick? That must be Joseph gathering nuts to feed his wife and child. Many of us have seen Rembrandt's painting of *The Holy Family* (one of several) in which Joseph is seen in the background dressed like a carpenter of Rembrandt's day working a piece of wood with one of his tools.

As a young boy, I used to wonder about these anachronistic and unrealistic pictures. Although I admired Rembrandt's realism, it puzzled me that the great painter wouldn't have realized that Joseph and Mary didn't look like Dutch contemporaries or live in a Dutch carpenter shop. No one told me that the artists weren't trying to paint Joseph and Mary as they would have looked were we able to time-travel. In the earliest pictures, I eventually learned, the purpose is entirely theological or devotional. Later, artists like Rembrandt tried to bring Christ's incarnation closer to his contemporaries by portraying Mary and Joseph as ordinary people like themselves.

In several paintings of the Adoration of the Magi painted for Renaissance nobility, the scene is crowded with sumptuously dressed figures preening for the camera, as it were. They are part of a parade of wealthy patrons, some more interested in being seen in their resplendent outfits than in bowing humbly before the Christ child. Did the rich patron realize that the painter was depicting him and his class as self-absorbed?

For some painters, turning out pictures that showed their wealthy patrons – merchants, churchmen, nobles – kneeling around the virgin and child became a major industry. Often various saints or other important people were included as well, perhaps to elevate the patron's spiritual status in this world and in the world to come.

Hardest to appreciate for me were all those expressionless, nondescript Marys with their pale oval faces and downcast eyes. They are devoid of any particular character traits, too ethereal and pious for this world. But that was, of course, the theological intent. I much preferred the Dutch painters of later times who made Mary look like a specific young girl and mother. But the earlier artists wanted to accentuate Mary's difference from us, turning her into an unearthly icon of piety, the sinless woman who would one day be taken directly up into heaven and given a heavenly crown.

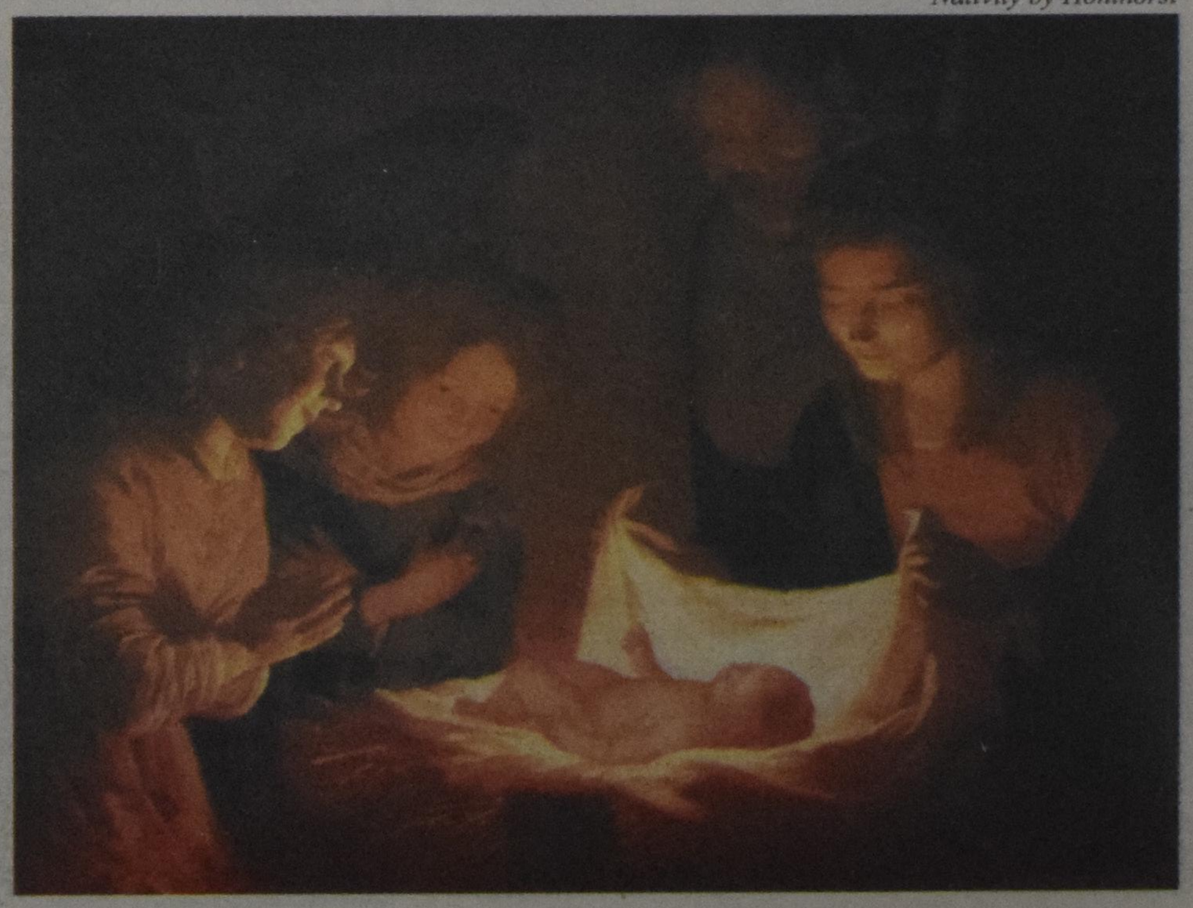
It is interesting to note that in a number of Annunciation paintings, Mary looks like the mirror image of the angel that has come to bring her the news that she was chosen to be the mother of the Savior. In many of these scenes, Mary resembles a cultured noblewoman, she is holding a book (the Bible), and the setting is often a richly furnished room or even a church building. She looks nothing at all like a simple Jewish girl living in a primitive house in Nazareth. Again, the artist isn't ignorant: he simply isn't interested in producing a historically accurate picture. He wants to produce something that will evoke the proper religious response and theological associations.

If you get the opportunity, this Christmas season spend a little time browsing the rich heritage of artwork on Christmas themes, whether in art books or online. You'll be amazed by how differently artists have depicted the familiar events. You'll see nativity scenes that are small and intimate, with Joseph and Mary hovering over the manger, the infant bathed in light. And you'll see paintings like those of Le Brun and Tintoretto in which the cattle shed is swirling and bustling with activity, with shepherds and their wives, cows, donkeys, sheep and dogs, various women (wet nurses perhaps) and oodles of angels swarming everywhere. You'll see representations of the Flight into Egypt in which Mary and Joseph are clearly in anxious flight, the darkness almost swallowing them. But there are also huge, peaceful landscapes which you will have to search to locate Joseph and Mary: there they are on a ribbon of road among other travelers, who are completely oblivious to the presence of the Son of God in their midst.

http://www.textweek.com/art/themes_a_d.htm
http://www.wga.hu/index.html
http://www.abcgallery.com/alfaind.html
http://www.biblical_art.com/index.htm

Annunciation by Van der Weyden

Nativity by Honthorst



Shepherds' faces

Molded and etched by wind, sun and solitude,
like the rugged, riven landscape of the hills
and valleys where they search for forage for their flocks,
their faces register a primal encounter,
a knowing worn down to stark essentials.
Battered and polished like stones by the elements,
by long wearisome days spent among bleating beasts,
their minds no longer compose nimble variations
on Israel's memory as David's once did.

Tell me, smelly shepherd, do you know what lies
there before you? Do you recall the ancient stories?
Or is your gaze not one of awe and wonderment,
but only dumb ignorance born of banishment among
the lowliest of domesticated beasts? Are you all
perhaps prodigals, wastrels who never repented
and returned to be accepted back into the lineage,
the long line of begats, going back to Abraham?

The sight-searing explosion of flaming angels
spilling out of the night sky like molten galaxies
from a cosmic blast furnace has forever blistered
their faces and their eyes. They are witnesses
who have been stricken dumb. Only here in this
imagined scene painted by one who did not see
do they get to speak belatedly to us –
and to share their dumbfounded incomprehension.

Was it only the insistent invitation of the angels
and the habit of obedience to authority
that brought you here? Did you dawdle? hesitate?
Did your duty to your sheep hold you back?
How many of your people believed your account
of singing heavenly visitors – returned after a no-show
of several hundred years? Where are the crowds
of sight-seers flocking to Bethlehem from Jerusalem?

Back with their flocks, huddled against the cold of night,
years later, did they ask each other, "Whatever happened
to that little baby we ran to see in Bethlehem
and to that young mother and her carpenter husband?
Do you think Herod killed him?"

HdN

Adoration of Shepherds by Goes (detail)

The faces of the magi

Kneeling at long last below the star
in dirt and straw, as the painters have it,
they assume the same attitudes as
the ragged shepherds who came before.
But these are exotic faces, framed
with ornate collars, jewelled cloaks,
bringing with them not just gold,
frankincense and perfume, but knowledge –
mathematics, astrology, legend and history.
Where did they acquire the store of wealth
to finance this expedition to Palestine –
enough to impress Herod in his great palace,
to be entertained as his guests, to send
the scribes all searching the prophets' scrolls?

Tell me, ageing wise man, student of the stars
and of the history and character of men
and nations, have your lifelong studies at last
come to fruition? Do you behold here their end?
Or are you now more dumbfounded, mind-
boggled than the shepherds? These gifts you carried
from afar, wrapped in linen, the precious products
of your esoteric scholarship, your necromancy,
your conjuring with chemicals and incantations,
your cultivation of people's hopes and fears –
do they now seem poor and paltry?
Or do you hesitate, wondering whether this
ordinary working-class infant squirming
in his mother's arms and blowing milk bubbles
as he returns your searching, probing gaze
is worthy?

They stand there awhile in all their finery,
not knowing what to say, afraid
to look at one another, weary, hammered
by the long, arduous journey, the silence
broken only by the snort and stomp
of horses outside the door, the creak and clink
of equipment, the muted murmur of slaves
and servants who wonder why they've stopped
here. Is it for this – this unremarkable place
noone would give a second glance – is it for
this that they suffered such hardships,
took such risks, spent such stores of wealth?

Tell me, wise men, do you understand at last
what your learning, your calculations, the star
that sparkled with such enigmatic brilliance,
the signs, the stories, the sayings and prophecies
signify?
Or has your journey only now begun?

HdN

Nativity by Charles Le Brun

Adoration of Magi by Altdorfer (detail)

Story

The Joy Seed

"...the rising sun shall come to us
from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet
into the path of peace."

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

When Joseph malevolently tripped Mary, sending baby doll Jesus flying from her arms across the school stage, I knew I had to escape up north as soon as the Christmas holidays began. The idea had nagged at the edges of my mind for weeks as I strained to muster up Christmas joy while teaching my third-grade students and directing the Christmas play to be performed by the seventh and eighth grade students.

I should have listened to Karen, a student, who, upon hearing that I had cast Ronald as Joseph and Carleigh as Mary, had said, "That's a mistake, sir. They can't stand each other."

"They can't?" I had asked, not knowing these students like my own.

Karen's warning, like an Old Testament prophet's prediction of doom, did indeed come to pass. Rehearsals became a nightmare as Ronald and Carleigh refused to co-operate. But by then it was too late to recast the production. At church, Carleigh's dad had slapped me on the back and said, "I'm glad you noticed my daughter's talent!" And Ronald's mother had given me the thumbs up at the grocery store as she dashed by me with her cart. Initially, I had envisioned the play's success. Parents would congratulate me afterwards and say, "That was unforgettable!" But now I dreaded with certainty that that's exactly what they were remarking. Who could forget Carleigh, sprawled out on the stage, wailing at Ronald, "I'll get you back"?

After the play, I called my mom and dad. "But the gifts are under the tree, Ken!" Mom said when I told her I wasn't coming home for our Christmas Eve family reunion. Maybe it's because I was single at 39 that she felt she still needed to give me a childhood Christmas – to compensate for my lack of a wife and children.

"I'm sorry, Mom. I'll try to drop by after New Year's Day. Right now I need to get away." I ran my hand over my thinning hair as I listened to her litany of concern and disappointment.

In the background I heard Dad say, "Let me talk to him."

The phone changed hands. "Hi, Ken. How are you?"

"Really tired. I'm not coming home. I'm going to do some cross-country skiing and snowshoeing at Arrowhead Provincial Park. I camped there last summer." I told Dad how I'd swum in the rust-colored water of Arrowhead Lake, viewed a glacial delta at Big Bend Lookout, hiked to Stubb's Falls beneath the dense, shady cover of sugar maples, and discovered the Porcupine Bluffs along Beaver Meadow Trail.

"Being there energized me to begin teaching in September," I explained. "Maybe it'll do the same for me now."

"Then go," he said quietly. "We'll be here when you get back."

"Thanks, Dad," I said. Isaac's blessing on Jacob could not have been sweeter.

Three days later, Christmas Eve I drove up Highway 11 to Huntsville. I pictured my parents' meticulous house descending into chaos and my mother becoming unhinged as my five siblings and their spouses, and my 14 nieces and nephews under the age of 11, converged on the homestead. The guilt pangs I felt earlier at deserting them evaporated as I realized that this year I could not play the role of cheerful Uncle Ken, successful teacher and lover of children, glad to be home for Christmas. Playing horsy with my nieces and nephews, and skating on the neighbor's backyard rink after Christmas dinner had always been a pleasure. But this year it would have overwhelmed me.

The wipers plunged back and forth as snow fell thickly on the windshield. Light against darkness. I concentrated on the road, searching for the Huntsville exit. Spotting the sign, I pulled off the highway and drove to the Gratix Motor Inn.

Inside my room, I unpacked my bag and leaned my cross-country skis and snowshoes against the wall. I clicked on the TV and watched the 10 o'clock news. The news anchor related that, because of clashes between Palestinians and Israelis, Bethlehem was almost void of tourists. Enough, I thought, and flicked it off. Obviously, I wasn't the only one having difficulty celebrating Christmas.

I rested on the bed trying to read *Maclean's* magazine, but finally tossed it on the bedside table. I switched off the lamp. The motel's flashing sign punctuated the darkness. As I recalled the play and other events in the year 2000, I thought about how darkness always seemed to take a bite out of the light. I recalled how in the past year Ashley, one of my students, had died in a car accident, how Mr. Bentley, a parent, had incessantly criticized me for how I handled his hyperactive son, and how despite my dogged efforts to complete my daily work, it never seemed finished. I longed to turn off the geyser of my tumbling thoughts, and finally fell into a restless sleep.

Christmas morning I drove the kilometre to Arrowhead Provincial Park and stopped at the park office.

"How's the Stubb's Falls trail?" I asked the ranger.

"Got snowshoes?" He asked. "Because that's the only way you'll make it down that trail." He turned to his computer and asked, "Name, please?" I gave him the information he required and paid the entrance fee.

"Are you prepared for today's partial solar eclipse?" The ranger asked. I groaned. I had completely forgotten about it. "It should occur around twelve-thirty p.m. You won't want to miss it!" He urged excitedly. "Have you got eclipse-viewing glasses? You don't want to look directly at it with the naked eye. One glance can cause permanent retinal damage."

"No, I don't," I said regretfully.

He rummaged in a drawer behind the counter. "My colleague brought in extra pairs of glasses in case people came unprepared."

I took the glasses he handed me, and thanked him.

"The last partial solar eclipse visible over North America on Christmas Day took place in 1666," he spouted knowledgably. "The next solar eclipse on December 25 will occur in 2307, but you won't see it unless you travel to Africa's west coast."

"I don't think I'll do that," I said, and smiled at his eagerness.

"There's a large clearing to the west of Stubb's Falls where you'll be able to view it," he continued. "Cross the bridge over the falls and follow the trail for half a kilometre."

Outside by the car I strapped on my snowshoes and put on my knapsack.

As I hiked through the hardwood forest and took in the pristine beauty of arching trees and steep ravines, glittering snow and deer footprints, I became aware, for the first time in months, of a "joy-seed" germinating in my heart. My students and I had coined the term when we'd studied a science unit on seeds, coinciding with devotions on the many and unexpected ways God plants joy in our hearts.

I finally reached Stubb's Falls and rested on the bridge that spanned the icy water. My stomach growled. I checked my watch. 12:18 p.m. I hurried on. When I came to the clearing, the eclipse had begun. Completely mesmerized I observed as the moon hid part of the sun, darkness taking a bite out of the light. And the dark zone grew. And grew. And grew. While watching, I thought again of Ronald tripping Carleigh, Ashley's death, and my job's frustrations. I ignored my hunger pangs.

Finally, I noticed that the dark zone no longer increased. The moon moved past the sun. And light returned in its fullness. At that moment I recalled a scene of the play I'd forgotten about.

Tim Delhouser, seventh-grade student with a big smile and no acting ability, had been given what the other students considered the most insignificant role. No costume. No makeup. Few lines. In the play's opening scene, Tim had read Zechariah's words about Jesus: "...the rising sun shall come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

Tim's four-year-old brother, sitting on his mother's lap in the front row beside me as I supervised the performance, had anxiously cried out, "Mommy, is the sun going to fall out of the sky?"

Parents snickered. Tim blushed. His mother replied, "No, it won't. Tim means that Jesus is like the sun. He came to be our dark world's light."

As I remembered her explanation and Zechariah's message, I felt the joy-seed bloom inside me. A gift from Jesus, the Joy-Giver. After eating my lunch, I left the clearing pondering all these things in my heart as Mary did so long ago.

A special gift that has kept on giving

Lisa M. Petsche

As Christmas approaches and wish lists get finalized, one thing is certain: no one in our family will receive a bigger gift than the one Sean, the youngest member, received several years ago.

Not only was it too big to put under our Christmas tree, it couldn't even fit through the door. It weighed 450 kilograms (1,000 pounds) and measured three metres (ten feet) in length, to be exact.

"It" was a West Indian manatee named Amanda.

Our family first became aware of these endangered aquatic mammals through a track on the VeggieTales CD, Silly Songs with Larry. Titled *Endangered Love*, it's about a manatee named Barbara who wears lipstick and likes to dance.

We didn't know what a manatee looked like, though, until we visited Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park in Florida, near my sister's home. Among other things, it's a rehabilitation facility for manatees recovering from injuries.

The first manatee we saw was at a distance; she looked like a boulder in the shallow spring water (we later learned she was napping). Soon after, we attended the manatee encounter program and got a good look at these unique creatures.

They're funny-looking at first glance, with their small, wrinkled heads, beady-eyed, whiskered faces, finger-nailed flippers, elliptical torsos and paddle-shaped tails. Once we got used to their appearance and learned some facts about them, though, we couldn't help but find these good-natured, slow-moving herbivores "cute and lovable," in Sean's words. He was completely captivated – and concerned about their plight. (Many manatee deaths are human-related, the most common cause being watercraft collisions.)

Each manatee has a name and a distinct personality, we were told by a park volunteer, who waded chest-high into the river to lure them over with a bucket of carrots.

After the program, we visited "The Fish Bowl," a floating underwater observatory, to see the manatees up close; some showed off by doing log rolls. (To view them, go online to www.manateecam.com.)

When we returned home, my husband and I decided to adopt a manatee for Sean as a Christmas gift. Proceeds from the Adopt-a-Manatee program support the Save the Manatee Club (www.savethemanatee.org), which works to protect manatees and their habitats. From the list of adoptees, Amanda, a Homosassa Springs resident, was the natural choice, having been rescued on Christmas Day after being severely injured by a boat propeller.

Sean was delighted to receive the adoption packet on Christmas morning. It included a photo and biography of Amanda, an adoption certificate, a one-year membership in the Save the Manatee Club and a handbook with information on manatees. A free plush manatee was also included; Sean named it Barbara and they've been virtually inseparable ever since.

On every subsequent trip to Florida, Homosassa Springs Park has been at the top of our family's must-see list. Amanda, who's quite sociable and loves to eat, always shows up at the manatee education program. (Like the other manatees, she's identifiable by her distinctive propeller scars.) Sean, meanwhile, always impresses the park staff with his extensive knowledge of, and affinity for, this warm water species most Canadian kids know nothing about.

Each visit, Sean picks up another plush manatee or two from the gift shop, to add to his collection. He's up to a dozen now – in varying sizes and shades of grey. The smallest is Squeaky, a fluffy keychain that simulates the sound of a manatee, and the largest is bullish, 56-centimetre Floyd.

Each Christmas, too, Sean looks forward to receiving an adoption renewal package that includes a surprise such as a fridge magnet, manatee-shaped notepad or stickers. We pair it with a calendar from the Manatee Club's online gift shop.

Even at his young age, Sean appreciates that these gifts support a worthy cause. And he takes his responsibility for Amanda very seriously.

When people ask if has a pet, Sean replies, "Yes, but she's too big to keep at home." Then he launches into a mini manatee education program. It's heart-warming to witness such concern for God's creation.

This year, Sean is giving Christmas cards that encourage recipients to "Celebrate the season with kindness to all creatures.".

Peace on Earth, good will to manatees.

Lisa M. Petsche is a mother of three and a freelance writer specializing in family life.

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

Real treasure

When we lose something that is precious to us, we are sad. If it's an irreplaceable heirloom, our regret is even greater. But if we find it again, our joy is great!

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says: 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15: 8-10.

Just as in the parable of the lost coin or in the parable of the prodigal son, there is rejoicing when what was lost is found. However, the treasure that Jesus refers to is not monetary treasure but treasure that is measured in 'soul' terms or more expansively, in eternally significant terms. Real treasure is the gift of life – here and now and eternally once our earthly life is past.

Scripture says that the angels of God rejoice when one sinner repents. We ought to rejoice too and really celebrate. This is why we may and ought to celebrate Christmas. Our gratitude for this gift of life is our motivator for participation in ministry through the giving of our time and talents, and in the use of our home, farm or business or money.

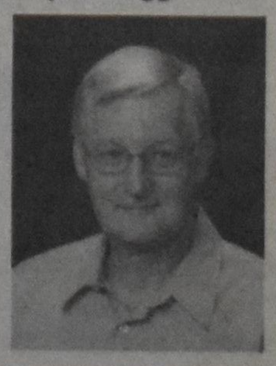
Too often we forget that we have been entrusted with this incredible treasure and neglect to share the good news. We have tasted the living water that Jesus offers and then neglect to reach out and share it with others. Instead, we are busy and concern ourselves with treasure of much lesser value. Our dollars and possessions can't compare, yet we are often obsessed or possessed by them.

This Christmas, it is my hope and prayer that every one of you, who read this column, may have a wonderful Christmas celebration. May you enjoy a time of rejoicing. Allow the image of God's angels rejoicing in heaven to inspire you to celebrate too! Consider what we can do to make angels rejoice? I hope and pray that we all may rejoice with them, for the gift of life, now and forevermore. A gift of real treasure that lasts!

Stewardly Tip: Give lasting treasure this Christmas. Many Christian agencies facilitate the giving of special gifts. Check out Christian church or agency giving catalogues, which allow you to purchase a needed item for someone in need. Jesus said "…whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40b).

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Resolutions



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The SUV Pastor

Pastor Ron Klok

Pastors are like SUVs. They require copious amounts of fuel and regular servicing. The picture in the newspaper only underscored this fact. A pastor was at the crash sight where a boy had died, walking beside the parents, car parts strewn about the intersection, a police cruiser resting in the background. The pastor looked a solitary figure, in close proximity to the father and mother, yet far enough away to allow for the space and silence the parents needed. As a pastor, I have been there myself – walking alongside others through the valley of the shadow of death – and I know what will be required of that solitary man.

In the days following a fatal crash, a pastor will sit beside the family on their mourning bench for many hours; agonize over the tragedy and feel its sadness in his bones; be involved in the logistics of funeral planning; stay up late and struggle with God, seeking to hear a word for the church, the parents, himself; be compelled to search his soul. And all the while, regular church life will carry on, and he may find himself having to think about future sermons he will preach, other people he will meet, classes he will teach, meetings he will attend, and unresolved feelings he has in relation to words spoken by some unhappy elder or parishioner. What will be required of the pastor is energy, copious amounts of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual energy.

Regarding energy consumption, what we oftentimes don't see is how the events and experiences of ministry affect the pastor's soul, her interior life, and her relationship with God. We might readily understand the taxing nature of the visible work of a pastor – things like visiting, teaching, preaching, funerals, and meetings – but it is much more difficult to see, understand and measure the energy required for the pastor's unseen and hidden work, the interior work of soul that comes as a result of ministry. Every ministry experience (of course, some more than others) affects the pastor herself, her personhood, soul, faith, capacity, and ability to love and lead, her life with God. These interior, unseen, by-products of ministry are both wearing and energy-sapping.

At any point in time, any given pastor is probably managing several and varied ministry related experiences and their affect on his or her soul. The confidences of a rape victim will fill the pastor with sorrow. A tragic death may raise a deeply personal struggle about the meaning of prayer and providence. A hard-driving elder may open old family-of-origin wounds.

In my first year of ministry, a young man got up one April morning, left his wife in bed, wrote a note, walked through darkness and rain, and jumped from a trestle bridge. The man's suicide death put me in a personal crisis regarding my understanding of ministry. I was compelled to deal with several matters of soul: anger about perceived injustice – it wasn't fair that God would ask such a young pastor to do such an impossible work. I felt deep disappointment – this was not the kind of ministry I had hoped for. And, finally, I felt completely inadequate to the task – I prayed Jeremiah's words: "I do not know how to speak. I am only a child."

Most people did not see this interior work, nor did they necessarily need to, but it still took energy. In fact, this hidden work required as much, if not more, energy than the work that was seen. Sorting out one's soul and the wear and tear of ministry is a demanding task.

So pastors are like SUVs. They require copious amounts of fuel and regular servicing. The energy that pastors consume goes to both their exterior work, work we can see, and their interior, soul work, work that is largely hidden and unseen. Because of the considerable energy required for ministry, and its corresponding interior wear and tear, soul-care for the pastor becomes paramount.

Soul-care comes in two parts. First, the pastor needs to refuel. We can call this refueling soul-rest. But the pastor also needs to process interior dynamics, interior responses to the events and experiences of both life and ministry. This second part we can call soul-work. Soul-care is, then, both soul-rest and soul-work, and both are critical to the health and well-being of the pastor.

Soul-work has to do with the awareness and sorting out of one's interior life, especially as it relates to God. Soul-work is a conversation with one's soul, done best in the presence of someone who can listen, someone like a spiritual director. Pastors need to articulate their interior life. And they need someone who can hear.

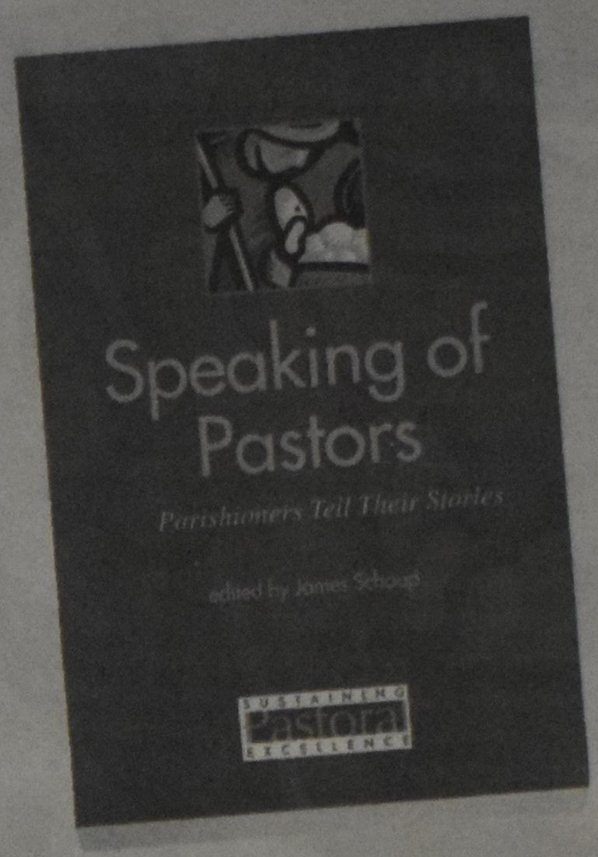
Pastors need to articulate not only the experiences and events of ministry, but how these experiences and events are affecting them. They need to articulate both their emotions, and what is going on beneath the emotions. How did that conflict, or that death, or that success affect you? What is your joy or anger or envy or fear or gratitude trying to say? What information do your feelings have for you about your relationship to God, your church, and your calling? What might God be trying to say in your experience? These are the questions of soul-work.

John Calvin described the Psalms as the "anatomy of all the parts of the soul." In the Psalms we hear people having conversations with themselves in the presence of God. "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" In the Psalms we hear the expression and articulation of every kind of emotion possible, from extreme joy to utter despair. In the Psalms we hear ourselves.

Pastors do well to pray as the Psalms do, articulating the anatomy of their souls as accurately as possible. This articulation of soul is essential to health because it brings into awareness engine sludge like envy and anger and pride and loneliness – sludge that left unserviced, can cause serious damage. Conversely, without prayerful articulation we will miss the depth and wonder of positive emotions like gratitude and joy. Soul-work is much like changing the oil on an SUV. It is the work of keeping one's interior clean.

Soul-rest is different from soul-work in that it is more passive. You could think of soul-rest as doing nothing – and pastors need to do a lot of nothing. They need silence and stillness in order to rejuvenate. Soul-rest may include getting lost in some kind of creative, wonder-filled activity not at all related to work; activity like pruning and pollinating pumpkins in the garden, or building sandcastles on the beach, or driving a golf-ball down a fairway. But soul-rest ought also to include personal getaways, spiritual retreats, in order to intentionally place oneself in the presence of God in silence and solitude. This, of course, is what Jesus did. He withdrew to be alone in the presence of God. It is where he found his strength.

Continued on page 17...



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For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio

W.H. Auden
What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid (Rom. 6:1-2).

Well, so that is that. Now we must dismantle the tree,
Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes
Some have got broken – and carrying them to the attic.
The holly and the mistletoe must be taken down and burnt,
And the children got ready for school. There are enough
Left-overs to do, warmed-up, for the rest of the week
Not that we have much appetite, having drunk such a lot,
Stayed up so late, attempted – quite unsuccessfully –
To love all of our relatives, and in general
Grossly overestimated our powers. Once again
As in previous years we have seen the actual
Vision and failed To do more than entertain it as an agreeable
Possibility; once again we have sent Him away,
Begging though to remain His disobedient servant,
The promising child who cannot keep His word for long.
The Christmas Feast is already a fading memory,
And already the mind begins to be vaguely aware
Of an unpleasant whiff of apprehension at the thought
Of Lent and Good Friday which cannot, after all, now
Be very far off. But, for the time being, here we all are,
Back in the moderate Aristotelian city
Of darning and the Eight-Fifteen, where Euclid's geometry
And Newton's mechanics would account for our experience,
And the kitchen table exists because I scrub it.
It seems to have shrunk during the holidays. The streets
Are much narrower than we remembered; we had forgotten
The office was as depressing as this. To those who have seen
The Child, however dimly, however incredulously,
The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all.
For the innocent children who whispered so excitedly
Outside the locked door where they knew the presents to be
Grew up when it opened. Now, recollecting that moment
We can repress the joy, but the guilt remains conscious;
Remembering the stable where for once in our lives
Everything became a You and nothing was an It.
And craving the sensation but ignoring the cause,
We look round for something, no matter what, to inhibit
Our self-reflection, and the obvious thing for that purpose
Would be some great suffering. So, once we have met the Son,
We are tempted ever after to pray to the Father:
"Lead us into temptation and evil for our sake."
They will come, all right, don't worry; probably in a form
That we do not expect, and certainly with a force
More dreadful than we can imagine. In the meantime
There are bills to be paid, machines to keep in repair,
Irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem
From insignificance. The happy morning is over,
The night of agony still to come; the time is noon:
When the Spirit must practise his scales of rejoicing
Without even a hostile audience, and the Soul endure
A silence that is neither for nor against her faith
That God's Will will be done, that, in spite of her prayers,
God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph.

He is the Way.
Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness;
You will see rare beasts, and have unique adventures.

He is the Truth.
Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;
You will come to a great city that expected your return for years.

He is the Life.
Love Him in the World of the Flesh;
And at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.

Rest on Flight to Egypt
by Gentileschi

Patoral Excellence... *continued*

The gifts of retreating in silence and solitude are many. Silence helps us to listen to our souls. Solitude allows us to be fully present to God. A place away gives uncluttered freedom, an undistracted space. In silence and solitude, Scripture becomes clearer and fresher. Prayer is slower, deeper, richer, more relaxed. Most precious, of course, is the presence of God himself. It is a wonder how much health and strength come by doing nothing. But that is the essence of a retreat, the essence of soul-rest.

Harry Emerson Fosdick reminds us that our power, our spiritual energy, "is not self-produced but assimilated."

"Every living creature," he says, "exists by assimilating and releasing power from beyond itself…our power is not fabricated in us but released through us."

It takes real spiritual energy from God to do the work of pastoral ministry. A pastor's energy is assimilated, and both pastors and churches must see and understand the pastor's re-fueling and servicing as integral to ministry. Without this re-fueling and servicing the SUV pastor will quickly find himself stalled at the side of the road, and I'm afraid that we are beginning to see far too many broken down pastors.

This spring, along with five other pastors, I arrived at a retreat centre in Los Altos, California. Our retreat was made possible through the Christian Reformed Church's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program. We had already been on a day-and-a-half, silent-directed retreat, a two-and-a-half day retreat, and now we were going to spend five days in silence.

All of us were ready for some refueling and servicing, and God did not disappoint us. If I had my wish, I would see every single pastor in the denomination do a retreat at least twice, for three to five days, every year. The reason is that I know what is required of that solitary man I saw in the paper, the man walking beside those parents through the valley of the shadow of death. That pastor – and every pastor – requires the energy and renewal that come only from God through soul-rest and soul-work.

Ron is serving a CRC congregation in Edmonton, AB.

Christmas comes to Losland farm

Bill Los

The furnace room is warm and cozy despite it's mechanical and 'unfinished basement' look. It has a real man's decor to it. This is where I pull on my barn overalls, my coat and my winter hat – some of them still damp from today's outdoor work in the snow. On the other side of the door my boots are waiting, cold and stiff in the unheated garage. By the time my feet notice the cold coming through my thick double socks, the boots are already warming up. As I trudge through the deep snow, invisible, silent snowflakes descend from a pitch black sky seen briefly only when they cross the beam of light shining from the back door of the house.

I make my way to the new barn first to check the cattle once more before bed time. As I approach the barn, I can hear the music of Handel's *Messiah* drifting over the cold air. The natural ventilation of turkey curtains easily allows the music to escape along with the warm, moist air created by the cows.

As I enter the warm barn, the aroma of feed and straw and manure greet me, delighting my senses. I walk behind the girls checking each one as the music continues to play. It has been playing since this evening's milking, and, as is my Christmas eve tradition, the Messiah will continue to play all night and into the evening of Christmas day. After swishing some straw under a few cows who are standing, I head to the barn office, where I will say good night to the fish in my aquarium and turn off their light.

Again I am making my way through the snow, only this time my destination is the old barn. On my way I pass by the big calf hutch, which can house up to nine calves, but tonight it has only three healthy young bovines curled up in their straw beds. Despite the low numbers, the hutch is decorated with Christmas lights, and again, as tradition has it, they will stay on all night tonight and right through until late Christmas evening.

The old barn door opens with a creak and immediately arouses the dogs, who run to greet me, growling at the cats along their way. At this time of day the cats fail to be alarmed. They just lie on their sides, stretch, blink their eyes and then curl back up into their sleep positions. The bewildered dogs then look to me for some playfulness which I too fail to give them. It's time for rest, for peace and quiet.... for peace on earth actually!

This barn houses the older calves, the heifers and the dry cows in group pens, maternity pens and in tie stalls. I first walk along the feed aisles, sweeping hay up to cud-chewing, bobbing heads. With their stomachs full and feeling quite content they only casually glance at my activity. They understand that it is night time and not feeding time but do they know it's Christmas eve? I think not.

When I was a child there was an animated Christmas special on television that proclaimed that at midnight on Christmas eve all the animals in the world could talk for one hour. I'd love it if all my cattle could do that. Once a year I would pull up a bale of straw, sit down and listen to all my animals for an hour. They could tell me all their fears and frustrations.

They could tell me what I am doing wrong and the changes they would want me to implement. They could tell me how much they hate the electric fence! Maybe the cows I recently purchased would let me know how much they like it here or, then again, they may complain of homesickness.

Maybe.... I stop short and begin to wonder how such a little legend, brought to my attention more than 30 years ago, could still come to mind every year again. I chuckle too at the fact that every year again I secretly hope that maybe this year it will really happen, but alas, even though I've often been in the barn at midnight on Christmas eve, I have never heard a word.

The only Christmas tradition these animals in the old barn will get is one lightbulb on for the whole night and the CBC radio with all it's Christmas music, poems and stories. The light bulb is hardly traditional since I also do this whenever I think a cow will calve during the night, but these creatures are not fussy and so they seem quite content with whatever Christmas gift I give them.

That's what I love about these farm animals, including the cats and the dogs: they are so easily content. In a sense they do 'talk' by the way they lie down after receiving fresh straw or the way they reach out with wet noses and grateful tongues during feeding time. Their eyes easily speak of fear or pain or sickness or contentment and if they are cold they will shiver. A true farmer listens to his animals all the time. Like an old Dutch translation of Proverbs 12:10 says "The righteous man understands the lives of his animals"

I love this old barn. I love it because it is so natural with it's hand-hewn wooden beams and fieldstone walls. As my mother would say, "It creaks with history." The thick walls make for wide window sills where cats love to sleep on sunny afternoons while the mice scurry above along the beams and between the cracks of the haymow floor. The only thing that's missing in this rustic barn is an old pair of wooden box stalls with a team of draft horses.

So here I stand in this almost perfect Christmas eve setting. That first Christmas 2000 years ago was so natural too. Aside from the angels, everything was ordinary and simple: shepherds and sheep, straw and hay and a barn. Simple parents and from all external appearances, a simple little child in a rustic old manger.

I guess what makes that night so long ago seem so similar to my night here with the cattle are all the things that are missing. There is no shopping mall busyness, no commercialism, no hectic traffic, no cash register line-ups. No candy-filled, crying, over-stimulated, over-tired kids being dragged around by frazzled mothers with bored fathers walking ten steps behind. No self-help books for those suffering from Christmas burnout like the one entitled "God Rest Ye Grumpy Scroogeymen." No politicians arguing about 'Christmas trees' or 'Holiday trees.' No, here there is just contentment and peace and quiet – peace on earth actually!

As I contemplate these things, tomorrow's Christmas day church service comes to mind. We will all come showered and perfumed and in our finest clothes. Our hair will be just right and we will smile and say "Blessed Christmas" to one another. There will be decorations and candles, a tree and a nativity scene, special music and power point.

I wonder, wouldn't it be more real, more down to earth, more natural if on Christmas morning we all got up and skipped the shower, didn't comb our hair or brush our teeth, but if instead we put on old clothes and boots and gathered in barns throughout the countryside to worship our Lord and Savior? Simple, ordinary people gathered together in simple, ordinary surroundings to worship a King who came down to our simple, ordinary level.

I close the old wooden barn door behind me and begin to make my way towards the farmhouse where my wife and children and my bed await me. Tomorrow, early on Christmas morning when all is still dark, my wife and I will walk this winding path through the snow, through the trees and on past the woodpile and calf hutch to a barn where patient cattle will lie waiting, totally oblivious to the fact that it is Christmas day. So why do I have my traditions of music and lights on all night? Do the cattle care? Does it even occur to them that the music is on all night? Do they try and shout to me "Hey, farmer Bill, you forgot to shut off the music!" Do they even know my name?

I guess these traditions are for us so that on Christmas morning we can feel emotionally warmed by little lights and music already in progress. It makes the morning feel different, special. Yet I can't help but think we can learn from the cattle that even something so profound and so unfathomable as God coming to earth in the form of a man can yet be greeted with simple ordinary behavior without all the hype and hoopla that we humans want to attach to it.

I turn off the furnace room light and make my way up to the main floor where flickering firelight from the woodstove dances on the pine ceiling. After one last look, I go upstairs, get undressed and crawl into bed beside my warm wife. I think to myself, "Does Christmas get any better this?" And still all is peaceful and quiet. . . . Peace on earth actually!

Bill Los is 45-year-old dairy farmer living close to Listowel, Ont. Together with his wife Ingrid, he milks 60 cows and helps raise five children.

Pictured here with Christmas choir member.

Christmas greetings

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men
on whom his favor rests.
Luke 2:14

Christmas Greetings from Holland Christian Homes

7900 McLaughlin Road South
Brampton Ontario
www.hch.ca

These residents of Holland Christian Homes offer their greetings for a blessed and happy Christmas and New Year to family, friends, and neighbors.

Mr. John Lootsma, Peace 807
Mr. & Mrs. P. Hensen, Hope 502
Zwier & Ann Adriaanse, Hope 512
Stan & Dorothy Antonides, King 602
Grace Sliekers, Trinity 408
Mrs. Tieny DenOtter, Providence 305
Mrs. Elze VanHemert, Covenant 805
Dirk & Rie Jongkind, Hope 714
Agnes Talsma, Faith 113
Rennie Kamphuis-Schroor, Trinity 508
Truus De Bruyn, Hope 707
Truus Baker, Hope 410
Louw & Willy Vanmarrum, King 203
Mr. P. Veenstra, Trinity 116
Henry & Beb Beintema, Providence 507
Mr. & Mrs. W. Braam, Hope 509
Mrs. W. Bremer, Covenant 501

Christmas Greetings

We wish our family and friends far and near
a blessed Christmas and a happy new year.
Jolle and Janny DeVries
795 John St. W
Listowel ON N4W 1B6

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The residents of

Shalom Manor and Gardens

a Christian Long Term Care Home and Retirement Centre in Grimsby, Ontario,
convey to their loved ones and friends their best wishes in this Christmas Season and for the New Year 2007.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. John 1:14

The following have requested that their names be included in the 2006 Christmas Greetings

Shalom Manor Residents:

Mrs. Jacoba Bax
Mrs. Aleida Buesink
Mrs. Grace Dam
Mrs. Jelske Dreijer
Mr. & Mrs. John Gueller
Mr. Dirk Heikoop
Mr. & Mrs. Peter Hessels
Mr. Jacob Hoogerbrugge
Mrs. Grace Janssen
Mrs. Jane Klein
Mrs. Hannah Krikke
Mrs. Suzanna Mol
Rev. & Mrs. Jolle Nulma
Mrs. Grace Posthuma
Mr. Andries Rynberk
Mr. Geml Schipper
Mrs. Anna Terpstra
Mrs. Neeltje VandenBerg
Mrs. Trijntje VanderVeen
Mrs. Maria VanderZwan
Mrs. Magda VanGeest
Mr. Bastiaan VanWingerden
Mrs. Meinsje Verwey
Mrs. Minnie Westerhuis
Mrs. Menke Broere
Mr. & Mrs. Koendert Byker
Mrs. Maria DeBoer
Mr. & Mrs. Jurrien Drenth
Mr. & Mrs. Bert Hartholl
Miss Dirkje Heijink
Ms. Rany Hofland
Mr. & Mrs. Hendrik Huisman
Mr. & Mrs. Ids Jornitsma
Mr. & Mrs. Jouke Kramer
Mr. Pieter Manni
Mrs. Jacqueline Noordzy
Mrs. Berendina Peterson
Mrs. Maria Proper
Mrs. Agatha Schipper
Mr. & Mrs. Jan Swylink
Mrs. Johanna VandenAkker
Mr. John VanderKuip
Mrs. Minnie VanderVliet
Mrs. Cornelia VanDyk
Mrs. Ann Vanvliet
Mrs. Anna Veenstra
Mr. Jacob Vyn
Mrs. Aukien Zeyl

Wishing you all the joys
His love brings

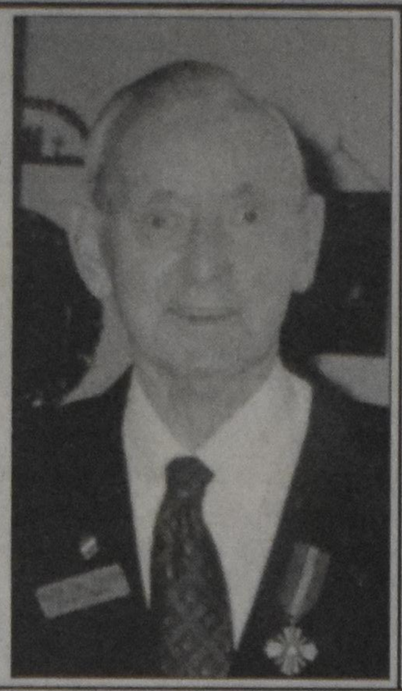
Shalom Gardens Residents:

Mr. & Mrs. John Branderhorst
Mr. Bert Elmers
Mr. Teunis Hunse
Mr. & Mrs. Henry Smeenk
Mrs. Stephanie Turczynski
Mrs. Dora VanMarmm
Mrs. Catharine Zwier
Mrs. Tine Burna
Mrs. Shirley Fluit
Mrs. Prina Koole
Mrs. Brenda Stellman
Mrs. Henny VanEs
Miss Adriana Vink

Classifieds

Birthdays

Give Thanks to the Lord, for he is Good
The family of
Abram Niezen
wish to extend their love and congratulations
on the occasion of his **90th Birthday**
on December 24th, 2006
Arie & Rena
Margaret & Paul, Robbie & Lynn
Russ & Nellie
Larry & Leslie, Cathy & Allan, Bob & Brenda
Bert & Diane
Brian & Nancy Jo, Dave & Melony
Ed & Kathryn, Chris & Hilda
Also 24 great-grandchildren



Open House will be held
at Wellingstone Homes on
Saturday Dec. 23, 2006, 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.
at the gathering room Phase 1
Home address: 1415 Upper Wellingstone Unit 102
Hamilton ON L9A 5E8

Helen (Hinke) Neef-van der Duim
is celebrating her
90th Birthday
on December 24, 2006.

Open house on
December 23, 2006 at
Caressant Care, Bonnie Place
St. Thomas, Ontario
from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Your presence is your gift.
Please keep your visit brief.

Love from your children,
grandchildren,
great-grandchildren and
great-great-grandchildren.

Address: Mrs. Helen Neef
c/o Anna Hofstee
15 David Drive
St. Thomas ON N5R 5L4

Retirement

The congregation of the First Christian Reformed Church of Vancouver, B.C., thanks the Lord
for his love and faithfulness to our pastor,
Henry Numan and his wife, **Aileen**
as they prepare for retirement
after **40 years in the ministry**.
We pray that God will continue to bless them and guide them as they enter this new chapter of their lives.

We invite family and friends to a **Farewell Service** and reception starting at 10:30 a.m. on **Sunday, Jan. 14.**
The event will take place at the church,
located at 2670 Victoria Drive, Vancouver.

Correspondence, including RSVPs, may be sent to
Clerk Richard TerMaat, 3257 East 18th Ave
Vancouver BC V5M 2R8
or emailed to retireman@canada.com.

Anniversaries

1956 December 2006

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household. Acts 16:31

With thankfulness to God,
we are happy to celebrate
the **50th Wedding Anniversary**
of our parents and grandparents:

Albert and Freda Snippe (nee **Baker**)

We congratulate them
and pray that the Lord
will continue to keep them in his care.

Love from all of us:
John & Kathy, *Allendale, MI*
Aaron, Andy, Nathan
Sylvia & John, *High River, AB*
Kim & Jared, Andrea, Denise, Peter
Diana & Jamie, *Owen Sound, ON*
Scott & Miriam, Shawna & Dustin
Rob, *Toronto, ON*
Deb & Rob, *Alliston, ON*
Faith, Charles

Home address: Pine Meadows
77 White Bark Way RR 1
Belwood ON N0B 1J0

1951 2006

With joyful thanksgiving, the family of

Bill (Wicher) and Marijke Boonstra

announce the **55th Wedding Anniversary** of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

With much love:
Jane (deceased) & Rudy Ouwehand, *BC*
Greta & Peter Goodwin, *ON*
Al & Gail Boonstra, *ON*
Dave & Julie Boonstra, *North Africa*
Kathy Boonstra, *ON*

Twelve grandchildren & five spouses, and two great-grandchildren, plus two on the way!

December 15, 2006
Address: 312 York Road, Caledonia ON N3W 2C5

Chatham Williamsburg
1956 December 22 2006

"Great is Thy Faithfulness"
Numbers 6: 24-26

The children and grandchildren of

James and Alice Kooistra
(nee **Vander Meulen**)

feel blessed to announce the
50th Wedding Anniversary
of our parents and grandparents.
They have both been a shining example to us
and those around them
of the love they have for their Lord.

All friends and extended family are invited to
an **Open House** on Saturday, Dec. 23rd
from 2:00-4:30 p.m. at the
Winchelsea Farms Restaurant,
1567 Country Road 31,
3km North of Winchester.
Best wishes Only.

Their children and grandchildren:
Henry Kooistra (1958 - 1978)
Bill & Rita Kooistra, *Williamsburg*
Megan, Alyssa, Kayla
Wilma & John Bakelaar, *Trenton*
Lawrence, Sara, Bethany, Jenna
Trudy & Martin Westervelt, *Williamsburg*
Milton, *Toronto*

Web Site: www.kooistra.ca
Correspondence address: James & Alice Kooistra
12537 County Road 18 RR 1
Williamsburg ON K0C 2H0

1956 December 15 2006

Praise the Lord, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Psalm 103:1

With thankfulness to God, we are happy
to announce the **50th Wedding Anniversary**
of our parents and grandparents

Ton and Tea Van Nes (nee **ZEYL**)

We thank God for you and how
he has blessed all of us through your love.
Congratulations on your anniversary!

With love,
Wendy & Richard Abma, *Calgary, AB*
Nico, Karin, Hannah, Luke, Marya
Hilde & John Craig, *Pitt Meadows, BC*
Joshua, Halael, Nicola, Matthew, Jonathan
Carol Ann & Brian Hiemstra, *Thorndale, ON*
Benjamin, Wyatt, Axel

Address: King Tower 102 - 35 Kingknoll Drive
Brampton ON L6Y 5G5

Springdale Stratford
1956 December 14, 2006 2006

He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord. Proverbs 18:22

The children and grandchildren of

Dick and Shirley Miedema (nee **VanderKooi**)

feel very blessed to celebrate the
50th Wedding Anniversary
of their parents and Pake and Beppe.

Dick and Shirley have faithfully passed on God's love and commitment to one another and to their children. We are privileged to share this special day with them.
All friends and extended family are welcome to attend an **Open House** on Saturday, December 16 from 2:30-4:30 p.m. at Greenwood Court Nursing Home, 90 Greenwood Court, Stratford, Ontario.
Best Wishes Only.

Their children and grandchildren:
Betty & Bruce Witteveen, *Waxsaw, North Carolina*
Alana, Lydia & Ian
Sally & Brad Dilkes, *Sarnia, Ontario*
Colette, Camille & Rebecca
Margaret & Don Wulff, *Fergus, Ontario*
Graham, Michael, David, Timothy, Jonathan & Matthew
Carolin & Gord Cnossen, *Vancouver Island, British Columbia*
Justin
Kelly & Jack Bolding, *New Hamburg, Ontario*
Kirsten & Tia

Correspondence: Dick & Shirley Miedema
303 Huron ST, Stratford ON N5A 5T3

Hippolytushoef, NH December 17 Niagara Falls
The Netherlands Ontario, Canada

With great joy and thankfulness to our Lord and Saviour, we join our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents in celebrating and announcing their **60th Wedding Anniversary**

Clarence (Klaas) and Jessie (Tjitske) Terpstra (nee **Ellens**)

Wedding Text: Psalm 48:14

Correspondence addresss: Clarence & Jessie Terpstra, 307 - 6305 Dunn St, Niagara Falls ON L2G 7T9
The last 3 digits of the postal code did not get printed in the last issue. Our apologies.

Obituaries

Alice Marilyn Bergman (nee **De Vries**)

Be still and know that I am God:
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. Psalm 46:10-11

Birdaard, The Neth. St Catharines, Ont.

Peacefully into the arms of her Saviour,
surrounded by her family on Sunday,
November 12, 2006 at the age of 61 years.

Loving Mother of
Dan & Cheryl, Anita & Art, Julia & Steve, Liz & Scot, Jonathan, Mike and Brittany.
Cherished Oma of Marisa, Shae-Lyn, Daniel, Kaela, Hayley, Megan, Isabella Alice and Jonah.
Sadly missed by her brothers and sisters.
Wybe & Ellie, Charley & Stella, Francis & Mary, John & Klaaske, Owen & Johanna, Jane & Peter, Freda & Albert, Robert & Jeannette.
She will be sadly missed by the Bergman family.

Predeceased by her husband John Bergman, May 2006.
The Funeral service was held at Maranatha C.R.C. in St.Catharines on Nov. 16, 2006.

Pieterziel, Neth 1913-2006 Pembroke, Ont.

The Lord took unto himself our dear mother, Grandmother and Oma

Doreen Wouda nee **Luchtenburg**

on November 9th, 2006 at the age of 93.
The Lord has blessed her with his love and faithfulness for many years.

Beloved wife of the late Fred Wouda.
Loving mother of the late Cora & Ron Rozeboom
George & Isabel Wouda, *Cobden, Ont.*
Harry & Dorothy Wouda, *Belleville, Ont.*
Beloved grandmother to 9 grandchildren and Oma to 10 great-grandchildren

Correspondence address: George & Isabel Wouda
PO Box 167, Cobden ON K0J 1K0

May 7, 1914 Nov. 18, 2006
Rotterdam, Nederland Bracebridge, Canada

God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1

Bedroefd geven wij u kennis van het overlijden van mijn lieve man, vader en opa

Arie Groenevelt

echtgenoot van
Cornelia nee Koedoot

Vader van Bas (overl),
Nancy (& George)
Gerrit (& Marja)
Art (& Cynda)

Opa van
Jennifer, Geoffry,
Yolanda, Johnny, Cori,
Dennis, Robert,
Lukas, Stephan
overgroot opa
van 13 kleinkinderen

Address: 89 Alice St Bracebridge ON P1L 1J5

Classifieds / Job Opportunities

Obituaries

1909-2006

GERDA VAN VELDHUISEN (van Dam)

Gerda Van Veldhuisen, in her 98th year, passed away peacefully in her home on December 1, 2006 in Whitehouse Station, NJ, USA.

Born in Holland and immigrated to Canada in 1951 and to New Jersey in 1963. Gerda was a member of Rockaway Reformed Church where her son-in-law is the pastor. Her passions included the church choir, dancing, exercising, and she was a talented seamstress, knitter, crocheter and loved quilting with her granddaughter.

Predeceased by her husband Willem in 1978 and 2 sisters. Survived by sons William (Grace), George (Fennie), Dick (Katherine) and daughter Willie (Reg). Eleven grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren, 4 sisters.

She loved the Lord, her life, and her large family. Never sick in her life except the last week. The last book she enjoyed was *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren. We celebrate her life. She will enjoy heaven.

Address: Dick/Katherine VanVeldhuisen, 1 Nelson Street
Whitehouse Station NJ USA 08889
e-mail: dvanveld@netzero.com

Stompwijk, The Netherlands — Brampton, Ontario, Canada
1928 — Sunday, November 26 — 2006

ADRIAN VAN KAMPEN

entered into his Father's Mansion at WOHC in his 78th year.

Those who cherish his memory are:
Betty Van Deemter, *Brampton*
Gijs & Gerrie Van Kampen, *Charlottetown*
Jacomien Biemond, *Dronten*
Wim de Ruyter, *Naarden*
Henk & Henny Van Oosten, *Oegstgeest*
There will also be an empty spot in the life of his namesake: Adriaan Brink, Adrian's nephews, nieces, cousins and friends in New Zealand, the Netherlands, USA and Canada.

His favorite Bible passage was Ps.87: "All my fountains are in you."

Address: TT 615 - 7900 McLaughlin Rd S,
Brampton ON L6Y 5A7
(email: twowoodenshoes@sympatico.ca)

Personal

Active widower (78) is looking for female companion for serious, honest relationship. Enjoy church and homelife, music and bridge.
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1 Hiscott St
St. Catharines ON L2N 1V8

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Faculty Positions

Dordt College is seeking applications in the following areas:

August, 2007

Communication Faculty (Possible opening)
Teach courses from Public Relations, Journalism, Cross-cultural Communication, Film History and Criticism, and Introduction to Public Speaking.

Economics Faculty (Possible opening)
Teach introductory and upper division courses in economics.

Health, PE, Recreation Faculty (Two positions)
One regular appointment, one 1-year appointment. Teach general courses in Health, PE, and Recreation, and some coaching.

History Faculty (Possible opening)
Teach Western Civilization and upper-level courses. Fields of specialty open, with willingness to teach non-Western.

Psychology Faculty (Possible opening)
Teach courses from General, Research Methods, Biopsychology, Statistics, Learning Theory, Cognitive, and Experimental Psychology.

To learn more about a position and receive application materials, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and curriculum vita/resume to:

Dr. Rockne McCarthy — Facsimile: 712 722-4496
Vice President for Academic Affairs — E-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu
Dordt College — Web site: www.dordt.edu/offices/academic_affairs
498 4th Ave. NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697

Dordt College is an equal opportunity institution that strongly encourages the applications of women, minorities, and disabled persons.

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DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM PUBLICATIONS

OACS

The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS), Ontario's oldest and largest independent school organization representing 82 non-denominational Christian schools, is seeking to appoint a suitable candidate for its senior management team.

The Director of Curriculum Publications will be responsible for maintaining the curriculum development program of the OACS and creating new programs to enhance the growing market for Christian education publications.

The preferred candidate will have a strong commitment to the reformed traditions of cultural engagement, have extensive administrative experience in OACS and/or Christian Schools Canada schools, be conversant with current educational theories of instruction and be prepared for the challenge of technological innovation.

A detailed job description and qualification schedule is available upon request. Salary and benefits will be commensurate with training and experience as outlined in the *OACS/OCSAA Administrators' Salary Guidelines*.

Suitably qualified Christian applicants are invited to apply before December 31, 2006. The successful applicant would commence duties in July, 2007.

A formal Letter of Application and supporting references should be sent to:

Dr. A. Guldemond, Executive Director
Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools
617 Garner Road, E.,
Ancaster ON L9G 3K9

Informal inquiries can be made to the Executive Director at adriang@oacs.org.

www.oacs.org

TEACHER POSITION
PONOKA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Ponoka Christian School has a full-time maternity leave position beginning February 26, 2007, and extending to the end of the school year with the potential of becoming a permanent position for the 2007/2008 school year. This is a Grades 6 / 7 combined class with additional responsibilities in Music and PE.

We are interested in hearing from committed Christian teachers preferably with experience and/or training in Christian education. Specialties in Music and/or French would be definite assets.

If you are interested in this opening, please e-mail your résumé with a cover letter, attention Mr. R. Duggan to ponxsch@telus.net.

Application deadline: January 26, 2007.

PRINCIPAL/TEACHER POSITION
PONOKA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Ponoka Christian School has a possible opening for a full-time principal/teacher for the 2007/2008 school year. This position includes teaching responsibilities in a combined Grades 8 / 9 class (60%) as well as administrative responsibilities (40%).

Applicants should be dedicated Christian teachers with a strong interest in and/or experience in administrative work.

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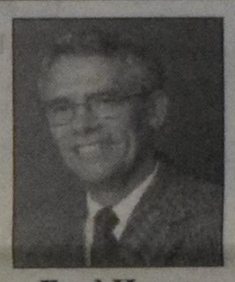

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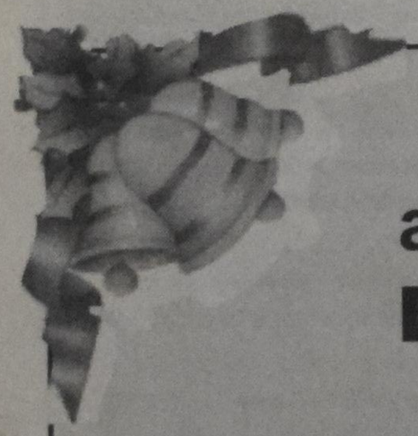

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- Prince George – CIRX.. 7:00 am 94.3
- Princeton – CHOR..... 8:00 am 1400
- Smithers – CFBV..... 9:15 am 1230
- Vernon – CJIB ..... 9:30 pm 94

ALBERTA
- Brooks – CIBQ ..... 8:30 am 1340
- Edmonton – CJCA..... 6:00 pm 930

MANITOBA
- Winnipeg – CKJS ..... 9:00 am 810

ONTARIO
- Atikokan – CFAK..... 9:30 am 1240
- Chatham – CFCO ..... 6:30 am 630
- Hamilton – CHAM ..... 7:30 am 820
- London – CKSL..... 7:00 am 1410
- Owen Sound – CFOS .. 7:00 am 560
- Sarnia – CHOK..... 7:30 am 1070
- Stratford – CJCS..... 8:45 am 1240
- Wingham – CKNX ..... 10:30 am 920
- Woodstock – CJFH..... 7:30 am 94.03

NEW BRUNSWICK
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- Halifax – CFDR..... 8:30 am 780
- Liverpool – CKBW ..... 7:30 am 94.5
- Kentville – CKEN ..... 8:30 am 1490
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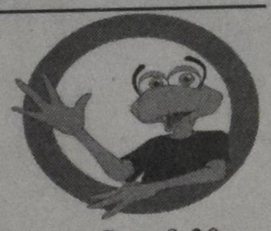

ALBERTA
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- High River/Calgary CHRB 1140 AM..Sun. 4:30pm
- Nordegg CHBW 93.9 FM..... Sun. 8:30 am
- Rocky Mtn.House CHBW 94.5 FM. Sun. 8:30 am

BRITISH COLUMBIA
- Prince Rupert CIAJ 100.7 FM ..... Sat. 10 am

MANITOBA
- Steinbach CHSM 1250 AM ..... Sun. 4 pm

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- Bridgewater CKBW 1000 AM ..... Sun. 5:30 am

ONTARIO
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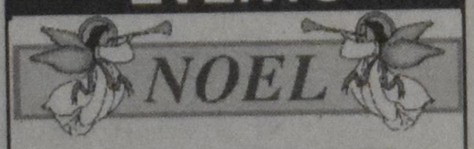

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We, the staff and board of Christian Courier wish our readers all the blessings of peace – reconciliation with God and with one another – this season and throughout the coming year.

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